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DESTINATION AUSTRALIA

ANCIENT HAMPI

NAGA CUISINE

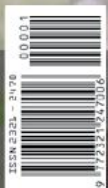
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STARK Tim 6419

Cover photo:
A woman feeding kangaroos with her family at Phillip Island Wildlife Park, Australia



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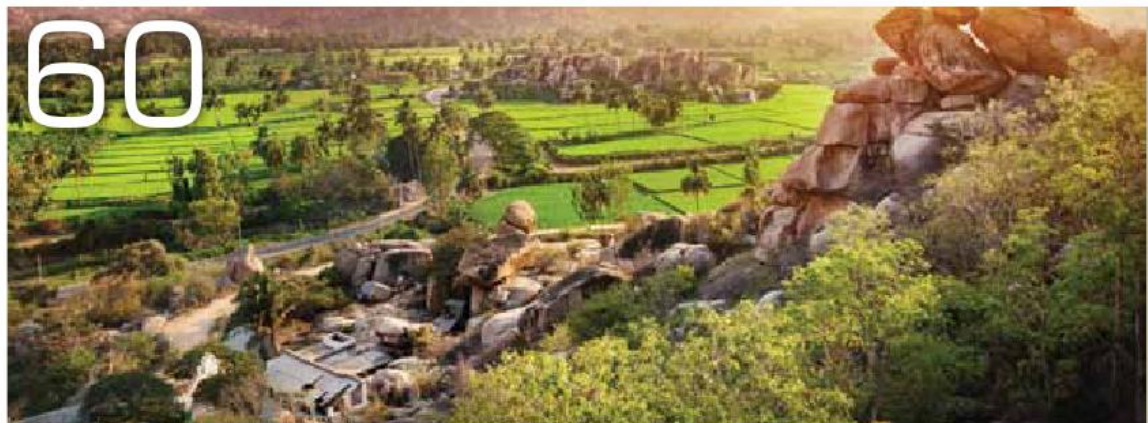
COVER STORY

DESTINATION AUSTRALIA

Australia is a place that has become synonymous with diversity and a melting pot of myriads of cultures. You could relax and spend a quiet evening with your loved ones or embark on a giant roller coaster ride across the island. Whatever you chose to do, you might feel like Dorothy did as she left Kansas to the Land of Oz

SPLENDOUR OF HAMPPI

A temple to architects, a kingdom's glory well preserved and a story hidden in its bosom, Hampi is a must visit in the large state of Karnataka. The site brings to light the history of the ancient Vijayanagara kingdom. Visitors would be awed by the mastery of the Vijayanagara architects who carved its spectacular buildings



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HONG KONG'S HUSTLE BUSTLE

If you long for the trip of a lifetime to a place that rarely sleeps and where the streets are alive with performances of martial arts and the hustle and bustle of holiday shopping, then Hong Kong is the place for you. You could go overboard and be a child once again as you enter Disney Land and meet your favourite characters up close

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A road trip through the Hoover Dam and Grand Canyon is truly worth it

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No camping trip is complete without the perfect tent

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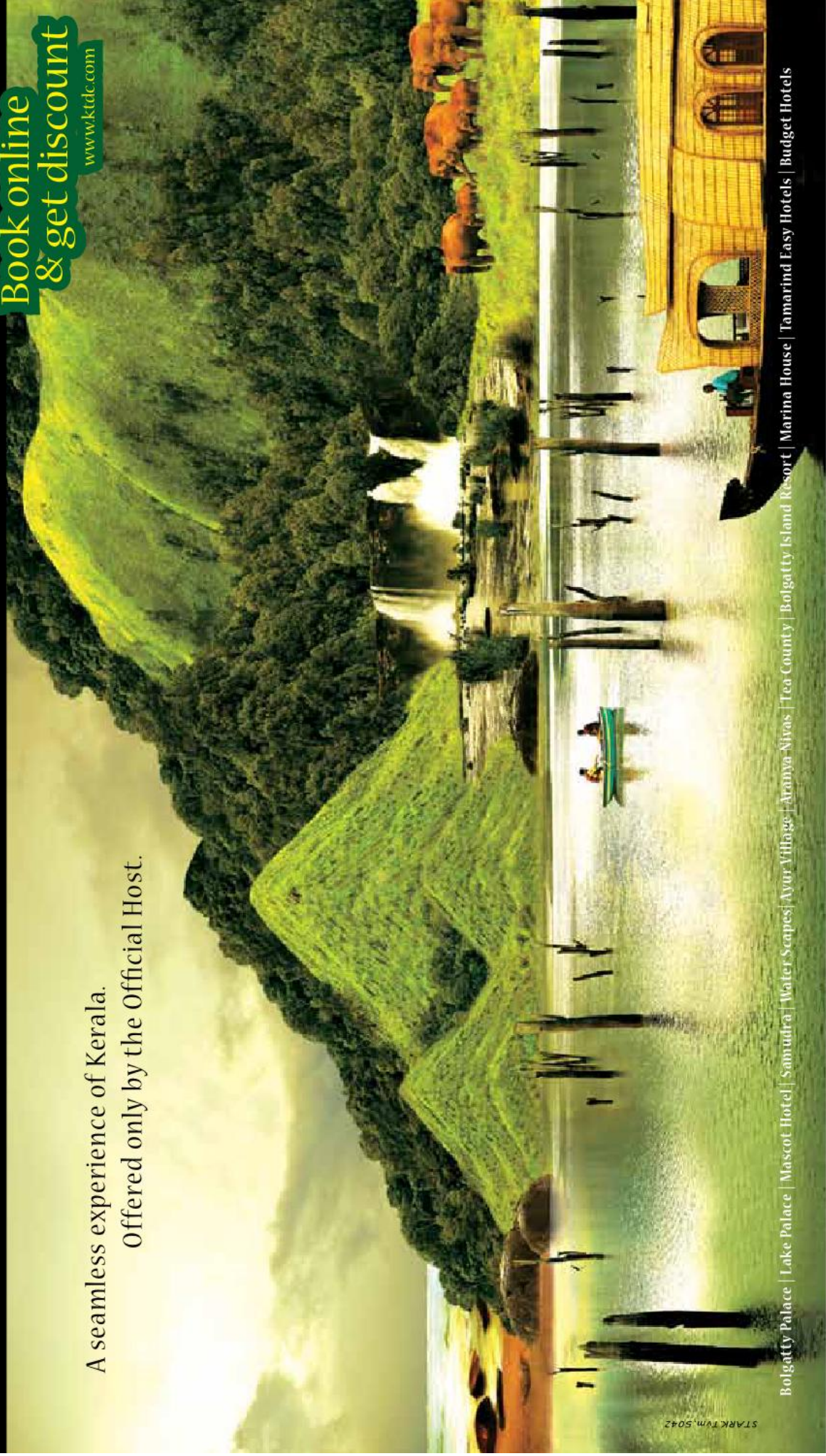
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

It's time for celebrations all over the world irrespective of religion and race. After X'mas celebrations, as we enter the New Year, we have reasons to rejoice. Some decide to start things afresh after a year of lull and void. For them, it is a new phase altogether with renewed hope and expectations. Some others find it as an opportunity to think aloud and plan more things than the previous year though the year gone by was satisfactory to an extent. Whatever the situation, people welcome the New Year with dance, drinks, fireworks and a whole lot of entertainments.

People move to their favourite spots to enjoy these holidays along with their families or friends. While some opt for their hometowns, others prefer far away locations like big cities or beautiful resorts where large scale celebrations take place beginning with X'mas. Certainly, people would like to travel just to meet their friends and relatives, and celebrate the occasion with them. Hotels, restaurants, shops, cinemas and all other entertainment venues seem to be busy with brisk business during this period. People throng all these places, and shell out extra money to heighten the festive mood.

Like many other cities in the west, Rio de Janeiro is celebrating New Year Eve. But what makes the event in the Brazilian city so peculiar is that it attracts people from all over the world and Brazilians from all states. Around two million people participate in the festivities every year. Cities like Singapore and Hong Kong in the east are not way behind in the X'mas and New Year celebrations. Crowds swarm main streets and bylanes during these festival days, where performances of martial arts and rehearsals of songs are held. In India, we join the festive occasion with music, dance and fireworks besides traditional events. Many of us go to preferred locations within the country and abroad to be part of the grand celebrations.

Australia is the new destination for travellers. Anybody would like Australia as it is a melting pot of different cultures of the world. Pleasant weather and palatable dishes besides all modern amenities will, of course, charm you throughout your stay in the new nation. The cover story 'Destination Australia' helps you understand how this country becomes a favourite destination for all.

As they say, Naga cuisine is not for faint-hearted. With dishes as diverse as frogs, grasshoppers and worms, one needs to be adventurous and have the taste buds of a Naga. If you love to have original Naga dishes in different tribal styles, visit Kohima particularly during the Hornbill festival. It is a food carnival in every sense. Read the story 'Fusion Naga cuisine' to know what all is prepared by Naga chefs for foodies. Wishing all T&F readers a very happy New Year!!!

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*Letters may be edited for brevity
and clarity.*

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Feedback



Wide range of stories

I am a food lover and I really like the way in which you have brought in a variety of culinary stories. The Northeast flavors particularly caught my eyes. It proves that we are still to explore the rich culture of our country.

Neha Arora, New Delhi

Kudos to T&F team

Congratulations to the Travel and Flavors team for yet another successful issue. I am a regular reader of travel magazines and I find T&F brings out a lot of variety. But I find most articles to be travel essays, rather I would like interesting facts and travel info graphics which can actually help a backpacker.

Antony D'cruz, Panaji Goa

An interesting magazine

Dear T&F team I am an NRI based in Dubai, and I found the magazine really interesting. It has got the right mix of India and abroad. I came to know about some of the best restaurants in Dubai through this magazine. I hope T&F will include more Middle East stories in the coming issue.

Arun Kumar, Dubai

Cool layout!

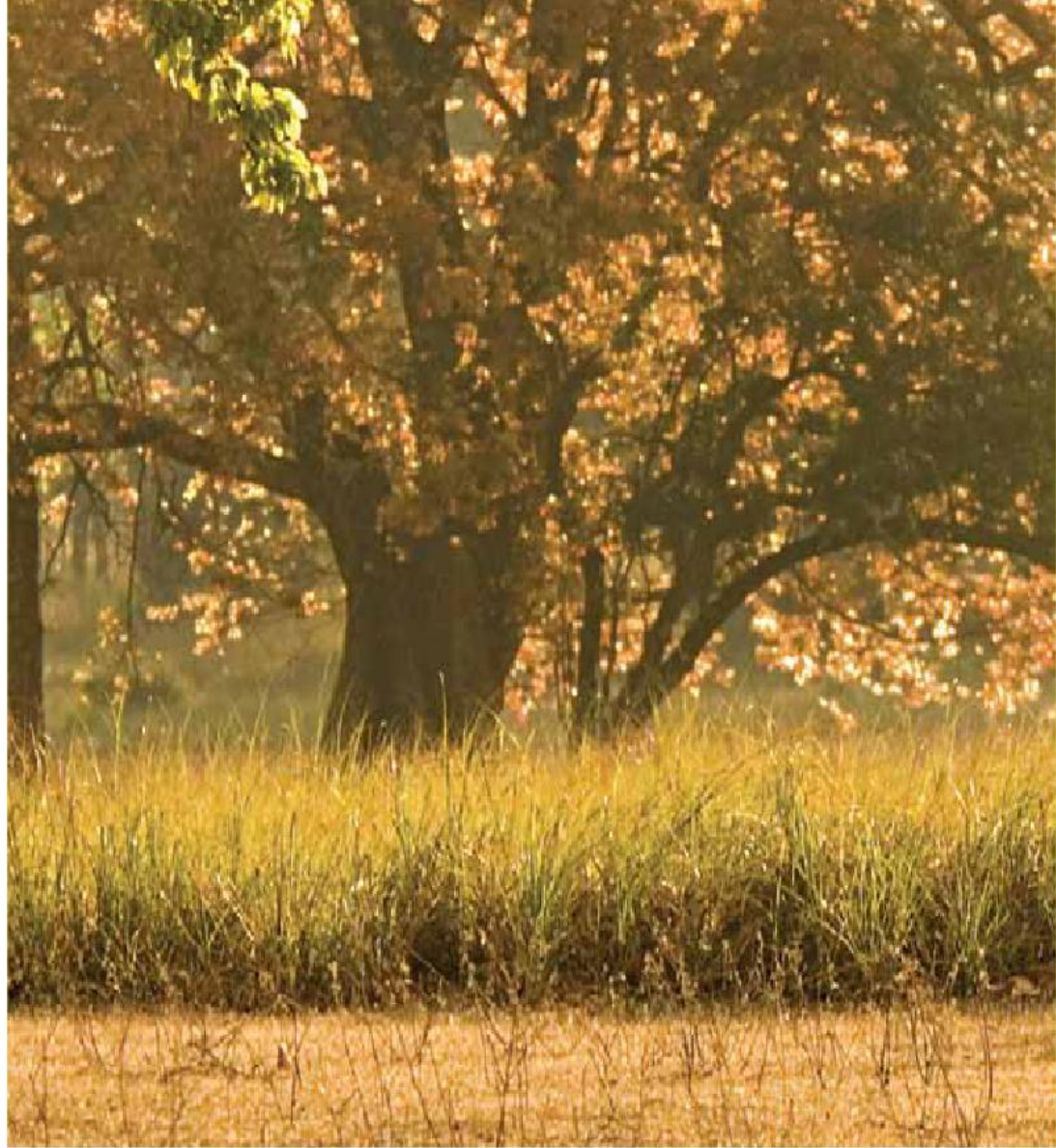
I like the creative layouts in Travel & Flavors. It tempts a person to read the whole story. I haven't seen any other magazine with a good sense of layouts. Keep up the good work.

Sam Jacob, London

INTO THE WILD
KANHA NATIONAL PARK



Rathika Ramasamy
*is India's first woman wildlife
photographer and one of the top ten
wildlife photographers of the world*





Best season:

November-June is the best time for a visit. The park is closed during monsoon.

How to reach:

Kanha National Park is around 175km from Jabalpur. It has excellent air, road and train connections from most parts of India.



Wildlife encounters at Kanha

A frightened deer and a tiger ready to pound its prey in Kanha National Park in Madhya Pradesh, one of the most beautiful tiger reserves in India. It is a typical Kipling land with sal forests, streams, meadows and a wonderful wildlife.

The main attractions here are tigers, Barasingha deer, Indian Gaur, deer, leopard, jungle cat, sloth bear and the wild dog.

There are two entrances to the park- one is Khatia and the other is Mukki. The Khatia entrance gate is in Mandla district and the Mukki entrance gate is in Balaghat district.

From the Khatia gate, one can explore Kisli, Kanha and Sarhi zones of the park. The Mukki gate covers Mukki range of the national park. Khatia is well connected from Jabalpur and Nagpur while Mukki is from Jabalpur, Raipur and Nagpur.

WORLD TRAVEL News

CHICAGO TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE SHOW FROM JAN 11

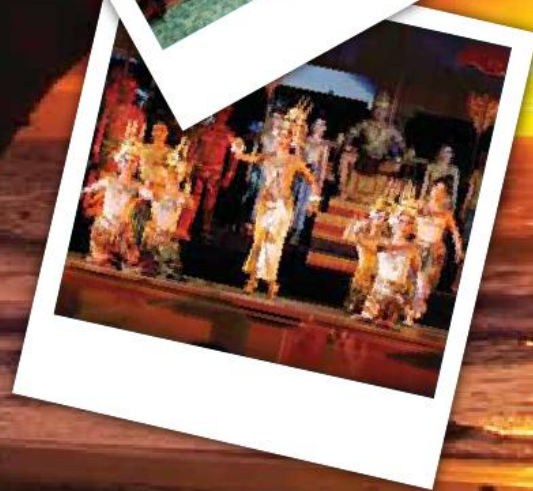
CHICAGO: The Chicago Travel and Adventure Show will be held at the Donald E Stephens Convention Centre, Chicago, USA, from January 11 and 12. The two-day event will discover authentic travel experiences and help you learn more about the destinations you would like to visit. The event will be attended by renowned travel buffs like Rick Steves, Patricia Schultz, Pauline Frommer and Chris Harrison who are expected to share their experiences and provide travel tips for adventure lovers.

CARIBBEAN TRAVEL MARKETPLACE FROM JAN 12

MONTEGO BAY: The Caribbean Travel Marketplace will be held at Montego Bay, Jamaica, from January 12 to 14. The three-day event is a premier tourism marketing event in the Caribbean islands. International wholesalers, tourist operators and acclaimed hoteliers from the Caribbean islands and across the world are expected to attend the annual event which sets the tone for travel packaging in the island.

ASEAN TOURISM FORUM FROM JAN 16

KUCHING SARAWAK: The ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) organised by the Association for South East Nations (ASEAN) will begin on January 16 at Kuching Sarawak, Malaysia. The event will conclude on January 23. It will promote the ASEAN region as an upcoming tourist destination where Asian hospitality and cultural diversity can be seen at its best. The forum will have the participation of prominent members of the travel and tourism sector from across Asia.



EAST MEDITERRANEAN TRAVEL & TOURISM FAIR FROM **JAN 30**

ISTANBUL: The East Mediterranean Travel and Tourism Exhibition will be held from January 30 to February 2 at the TUYAP Fair, Convention and Congress Center at Istanbul, Turkey. Hacı Aydın, the Director of Ekin Fair, and top officials from the travel and tourism industry of the country will participate in the event which has become one of the world's top five tourism fairs.

SATTE TRAVEL MART FROM **JAN 29**

NEW DELHI: The South Asian Travel and Tourism Exchange (SATTE) Travel Mart will be held from January 29 to 31 at the Pragati Maidan, New Delhi. With India fast growing as a rapid market for travel and tourism in the world, the travel mart will be the biggest in the country. The three-day event will have the participation of a number of eminent people from the travel and tourism industry in South Asia.

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER TRAVEL SHOW FROM **JAN 25**

PENNSYLVANIA: The Philadelphia Inquirer Travel Show will be held at Valley Forge Convention Centre in Pennsylvania from January 25 to 26. The two-day event which is expected to draw huge crowds is hailed as one of the biggest travel events in the region in the recent past.

DESTINATIONS HOLIDAY AND TRAVEL SHOW FROM **JAN 23**

MANCHESTER: The Destinations Holiday and Travel Show will be held from January 23 to 26 at Event City, Manchester, the UK. The four-day event will bring together travel buffs and experts from the travel and tourism industry. The Holiday and Travel Show will provide fresh ideas and will be an inspiration for hundreds of exhibitors, tour operators and cruise companies.

TELEGRAPH ADVENTURE TRAVEL SHOW FROM **JAN 25**

LONDON: The Telegraph Adventure Travel Show will be held at Olympia, London, the UK, from January 25 and 26. The two-day show will provide travel tips by experts, explorers, tour leaders and writers. It will also feature specialist travel providers who will offer travel experiences and more to those looking to pack their bags and head on an adventure holiday. Tour operators and those in the adventure sport industry will also be part of the event.



JANUARY

EVENTS CALENDAR

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
January 1	Polar Bear Swim	Vancouver, Canada
January 1	Rose Parade	Los Angeles, US
January 2	Dubai Shopping Festival	Dubai, UAE
January 2	Cape Minstrel Carnival	Cape Town, South Africa
January 5–6	Carnival of Blacks & Whites	Pasto, Colombia
January 6	Accompong Maroon Festival	Accompong, Jamaica
January 9	Black Nazarene Procession	Manila, Philippines
January 10	Voodoo Festival	Ouidah, Benin, Africa
January 10-19	Ati-Atihan	Kalibo, Philippines
January 11-12	Festival in the Desert	Essakane, Mali
January 12	Yamayaki	Nara, Japan
January 13	Vogel Gryf	Basel, Switzerland
January 14	Kite Festival	Jaipur, India
January 14	Gangasagar Mela	Sagar Island, India
January 15-16	Bikaner Camel Festival	Bikaner, India
January 16-25	World Buskers Festival	Christchurch, New Zealand
January 16-26	Sundance Film Festival	Utah, US
January 16	International Circus Festival of Monte Carlo	Monte Carlo
January 18–20	Timkat (Epiphany)	Gonder, Ethiopia
January 20	Drum Festival	San Sebastian, Spain
January 24-25	Tamworth Country Music Festival	Tamworth, Australia



'Miracle' statue procession

The Black Nazarene Procession carrying the 'miracle' statue of Jesus Christ is not just any other procession as the people of Philippines give so much importance to this ceremony and it has become part of their faith

Black Nazarene Procession

*When: January 9
Where: Philippines*

The Black Nazarene Procession revolves around a curious life like statue of Jesus Christ carved from ebony, believed to be a miracle wielder of sorts. The statue was brought to the Philippines from Mexico in the 17th century and was placed at Quiapo Church in 1767. Today, the statue has become synonymous with the annual Black Nazarene Procession in the largely Catholic country.

Thousands of barefoot men join the procession as walking barefoot is believed to be a sign of humility. During the procession, the barefoot men yell, "viva senior" and everyone in the neighborhood tries to touch the statue of Christ as they believe that miracle happens to those who touch the statue. Thousands of pilgrims from all over the

country come to Manila to be a part of the procession every year. All those who participate in the procession hope that they would get an opportunity to touch the wooden statue.

Traditionally, only men were allowed to be part of the procession but in the recent years, women have begun to take part in the procession. Towels and handkerchiefs are hurled at barefoot devotees clad in maroon clothes who escort the Black Nazarene statue with requests to wipe the statue with the towels. The statue is more than 200 years old and it is believed that the statue was brought to Manila at the time when Spanish missionaries arrived in the country. A fire on board the ship led to the statue catching fire. Despite its charred condition, the statue was kept safe and worshipped from then on. ■

Flying high with kite festival

The kite festival in **Gujarat** will hold you spellbound. Even if you are not a kite flyer, you can enjoy the festival watching kites of different shape, size and colour flying in the sky



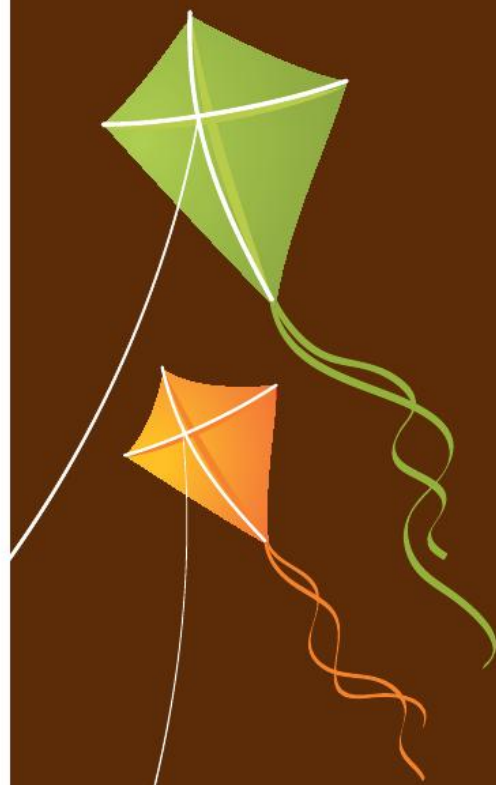


The kite festival that marks the end of a long winter coincides with the celebration of Makar Sankranti or Uttarayan. The festival heralds the arrival of spring. Clear blue sky and cool breeze create a mood of celebration throughout the state of Gujarat. People enjoy flying kites of different size and colour in every part of the state. This is the time when normal activities cease and everyone takes to rooftops and roadways to fly kites. Myriads of colorful kites with varied shapes and sizes floating in the air are certainly a sight to behold.

One of the attractive events of the festival is the kite flying competition where those who are keen on kite flying battle it out in the skies. The atmosphere is quite festive as the entire family gathers around and special delicacies are prepared for the occasion. The kite markets are open from November and one can find kites of all shapes and sizes. At night, kite flyers send up bright white kites that could be visible in the pitch dark. From early morning to late night, the festival of Uttarayan provides plenty of fun for visitors.

Since 1989, the city of Ahmedabad has hosted the International Kite Festival as part of the Uttarayan celebrations inviting master kite makers and flyers from across the world to demonstrate their creations and skills in kite flying. In the past, kites from Malaysia, China and even Italy had held the crowd spellbound.

It has been noted that the tradition of kite flying was quite popular during the times of kings and nawabs. It began as a sports event for kings but overtime, it became so popular that it reached the masses. Although the idea of kite flying was introduced by the Muslim rulers in India, it later became an inevitable part of the Makar Sankranti celebrations in the state. One of the best places to enjoy kite flying is the Sardar Patel Stadium where you can spot some of the most spectacular kites ever. ■



Kite Festival

When: January 14

Where: Gujarat



An indigenous festival of Benin

The chilling Voodoo festival is typically a tribal ritual with animal sacrifice and wild dance. Every year on January 10, the people of Benin gather at Quidah to perform rituals seeking blessings from the Voodoo chief

Voodoo Festival

*When: January 10
Where: West Africa*

Benin is not an average African nation. It's a place where magic and Voodoo craft are taken seriously and Voodoo is the religion of millions of people in the former French colony located in West Africa. On a regular day, it's common to see people offering prayers and slaughtered goats at local shrines or a village headman with a garland of snakes offering prayers at the serpent temple. You would be chilled to the bone on seeing these sights but on the day of the Voodoo festival, you might find yourself in an enchanting atmosphere that is certainly infectious.

It's hard to miss the Voodoo dolls with nails as you tour the city of Ouidah. But the Voodoo festival held annually from January 10 is one of the most vibrant and colorful festivals in the West African nation. You begin to let loose and take part in the festivities once you

look beyond the Hollywood stereotypes associated with the Voodoo practice.

The Government of Benin officially declared Voodoo as a religion in 1997. Thousands of believers flock to Ouidah during the festival. It's the time not just for fun and frolic but also to appease the power worshipped in the form of eerie looking dolls with nails driven on them. The number of devotees who throng the historic centre of Voodoo worship during the festival seeking blessings from the Voodoo chief is quite staggering.

The celebrations begin with the sacrifice of a goat by the supreme Voodoo priest in honour of the spirits amidst songs, dance, drum-beats and the consumption of gin. Local rites related to Voodoo worship are also performed in the presence of the Voodoo chief and the priests who assemble at the site. ■



Firoze Edassery
is a photography and travel
enthusiast based in Dubai



At twilight: The view of Ibn Battuta gate in Dubai at dusk



Roy Jacob is a network engineer and a travel enthusiast based in Dubai



LAND'S EDGE: People in canoes watching cliffs at the Phang Nga Bay, Phuket in Andaman Sea.



Shyamsundar Govindan is a photography and travel enthusiast



FOR A GOOD CATCH: A man engaged in fishing on a misty morning in Banasura Lake, Wayanad.



CULTURAL EXTRAVAGANZA: A Rajasthani tribesman with his camel at the Pushkar Camel Fair which brings together different indigenous groups of the state to exhibit their cattle, especially camels, and artifacts.



Rajesh Venkaya is a traveller and a professional photographer



DESERTSCAPE: A jeep making its way through a desert in Dubai.



Shalet James is a travel writer based in Kochi



CAMEL RIDE: Visitors enjoy a ride in a camel cart during the Pushkar Camel Fair in Rajasthan. The colourful festival in a desert setting is so famous that a number of people from abroad come here to watch the fair every year.

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NORTH EAST TALES
HORNBILL FESTIVAL



NAGAS'



cultural extravaganza

| Jenny Thingshung |

The Hornbill festival named after the bird is one of the largest celebrations of the warrior tribes of Nagaland. The festival is a showpiece of Naga culture and traditions



The Hornbill festival reflects all aspects of Naga culture. In the past, fighting and battles were the way of life for Nagas. Many Naga tribes were traditional head-hunters but with the arrival of Christianity, it began to change and head-hunting was gradually banned. This lifestyle change has diminished the charm of the people. The Hornbill festival is organised to revive, protect and promote the richness of the Naga heritage and traditions. Once a local event, the Hornbill festival in December has

become a major attraction for domestic and international tourists. The festival brings together all the tribes at the foothills of the lofty Mount Jafu in Kisama.

The scenic Kisama Heritage Village, around 10 km from Kohima, the capital of Nagaland, is unique in many aspects. The imposing tribal Morungs (male dormitories) which exhibit the typical architectural style of different Naga tribes are the centre of attraction. Every Naga tribe is represented by its respective Morungs. Tribesmen and women perform ancient folk dances, sing songs, play

indigenous games and conduct rituals now on the verge of extinction. Some of the rituals like healing embarrass you while others make you laugh your guts out. The tribal battle cry and the enactment of real battles were truly a mesmerising experience.

Stories that I had heard long ago from my now deceased grandfather rushed to my mind. Watching the head-hunting battle enacted in front of me in the arena where I was seated was a haunting reality. The colourful ensemble of different tribes was an alluring sight. The rich design of the traditional



attire is much desirable and calls for a need for the tribal haute couture to be sustained and revived. Warrior log drums, colourful headgear, soulful war cry, the exquisite costumes etc. are simply enchanting. Heady Naga rice beer (zothu/thutse), served in large bamboo mugs and buffalo horns, draws visitors to try and feel the intoxication that their forefathers enjoyed. It is a must try for everyone.

More indigenous games like greasy pole climbing competitions,

chilly eating contests and even meat kicking contests are enjoyed with awe and pride. The Hornbill festival doesn't offer just a cultural glimpse, there are more modern affairs too like vintage car rallies, global film festivals, cycling, dance competition, musicals etc. Surely, the festival is a medley of unlimited fun and cultural extravaganza. After sunset, there would be strings of colourful events. The festival also lends its energy level into the night through various activities like night bazaar,

music concerts, beauty pageant and fashion shows at different venues.

One of the things I loved the most during this festival is the lively Kohima night bazaar. The night bazaar was a luxury for locals as night life is non-existent in this part of the world owing to insurgency and militant threats. Shutters are normally down by 7-8 pm. So it was a welcome change for the locals. The stretch of Kohima's main town comes alive during the festival with food, music and fun. The street is

overcrowded with various food stalls serving some of the finest Naga delicacies and walking through the hustle-bustle and the sights and sounds of the night is simply incredible.

And in the day, victory cry and symphony of drum beats and rhythmic sound of barefoot dancing and thumping the earth occur in the presence of tribesmen and women with hornbill's feathers on their heads. As I reflected upon the extravaganza, I wondered if this frenzy would still be there in the coming years. ■



Experience luxury yachting with **SeaDream**

| Tony William |

SeaDream I and SeaDream II

SeaDream's twins- luxury mega-yachts SeaDream I and SeaDream II- were designed as prototypes for the ultra-luxury yachting experience. To enhance yachting experience you have teak decks with plenty of room to stroll. It has a beauty salon, a well-equipped gym and a great spa consisting of three treatment rooms. Each suite has a small sitting area with a couch. A mini fridge stacked with sodas and beer is also there. A set of cotton pajamas with the SeaDream logo and your name on it is an added advantage at SeaDream. Room amenities include Belgian linens, down duvets, wool blankets and Bulgari bath products.

If you dream of lying on the deck of a yacht, watching the stars, then SeaDream can make that dream come true. Your only hassle is that you have to prearrange it with the crew. You can also dine outside on select

SeaDream celebrates nothing but the travellers' yachting experience. With a 95 member crew, the level of attention and service given by SeaDream to each guest makes you feel like you are on your private yacht



evenings aboard SeaDream. SeaDream II has a retractable marina which offers glass-bottom kayaks, stand-up paddleboards, banana boats, go-tubing or boarding, snorkel equipment and laser sailboats or swim, kick back and lounge on the floating island. You could simply go water-skiing or ride a Jet Ski and make the best use of them all with the assistance of the yacht's marina staff. SeaDream I and SeaDream II have also got the top two ratings in the Boutique Ships category of the 2013 Berlitz Guide to Cruising and Cruise Ships.

The SeaDream voyage fair includes all meals served at open seating in their dining salon or Al Fresco at the outdoor topside restaurant, 24-hour room service from the "Small Bites" menu, gratuities, open bar with selected premium brands, daily selection of wines to accompany lunch and dinner, water "toys" from the yacht's marina, wake boards, swim platform, mountain bikes for shore side exploration, state-of-the-art golf simulator with 30 signature golf courses, library with over 1,200 hardback books, extensive CD and DVD library, pool and Jacuzzi and a fitness centre.

Entertainment

In the Casino, try a few moves at the Black Jack tables. At the Piano Bar, request the piano player to play your favourite tune and enjoy your dinner cocktail or go for the live guitar.

A trip aboard SeaDream II

Starting on February 15, 2014 from Bali (Benoa) aboard SeaDream II, you have seven ports of call, including Bali, Satonde Island (Pulau Satonde), Komodo Island, Lembar (Lombok), Sekotong Tengah, Semarang, Central Java, Pulau Seribu/Sepa (1000 Islands) and Singapore.

At Bali, the tiny clove-scented island off Java's southeastern tip, you can find at least a Balinese Hindu temple in the island's tiniest villages. SeaDream is offering several



Passengers enjoying water sports

active land adventures at Benoa. Enjoy a challenging round of golf, take a painting lesson or learn some exciting new cooking techniques from a master chef. Visit the uninhabited volcanic island -Satonde Island- on Sumbawa's northern shore. You can also explore the flora and fauna of the island. Inside the partially collapsed volcanic crater lies the island's salt lake fed by an underground channel. You can also see the indigenous Komodo Dragons (Monitor Lizard) here.

The 'island of a thousand mosques', Lombok was transformed when Islam reached the Indonesian archipelago in the 16th century. Visit an authentic Sasak community or bicycle your way to Mapak village with SeaDream Land Adventurers. Semarang Harbour is an ideal starting point for exploring the island, especially the wonder that is Borobudur. At Pulau Seribu/Sepa (1,000 Islands), a string of small islands stretching outside the Bay of Jakarta, offers accessible refuge to those who dwell in the huge city.

Your last port of call is Singapore, a shopping paradise and an economic marvel. You will wish your dream journey to continue and it is this same feeling that takes you back to SeaDream for yet another marvelous yacht journey. ■

*For fare and other details, log on to
www.seadream.com*



Crew enjoying champagne



Guests with the signed Sea Dream flag

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THUS SPAKE THE SHOTS
KATHAKALI

Kathakali

Faces & costumes

Photos & Text
Jose Jacob

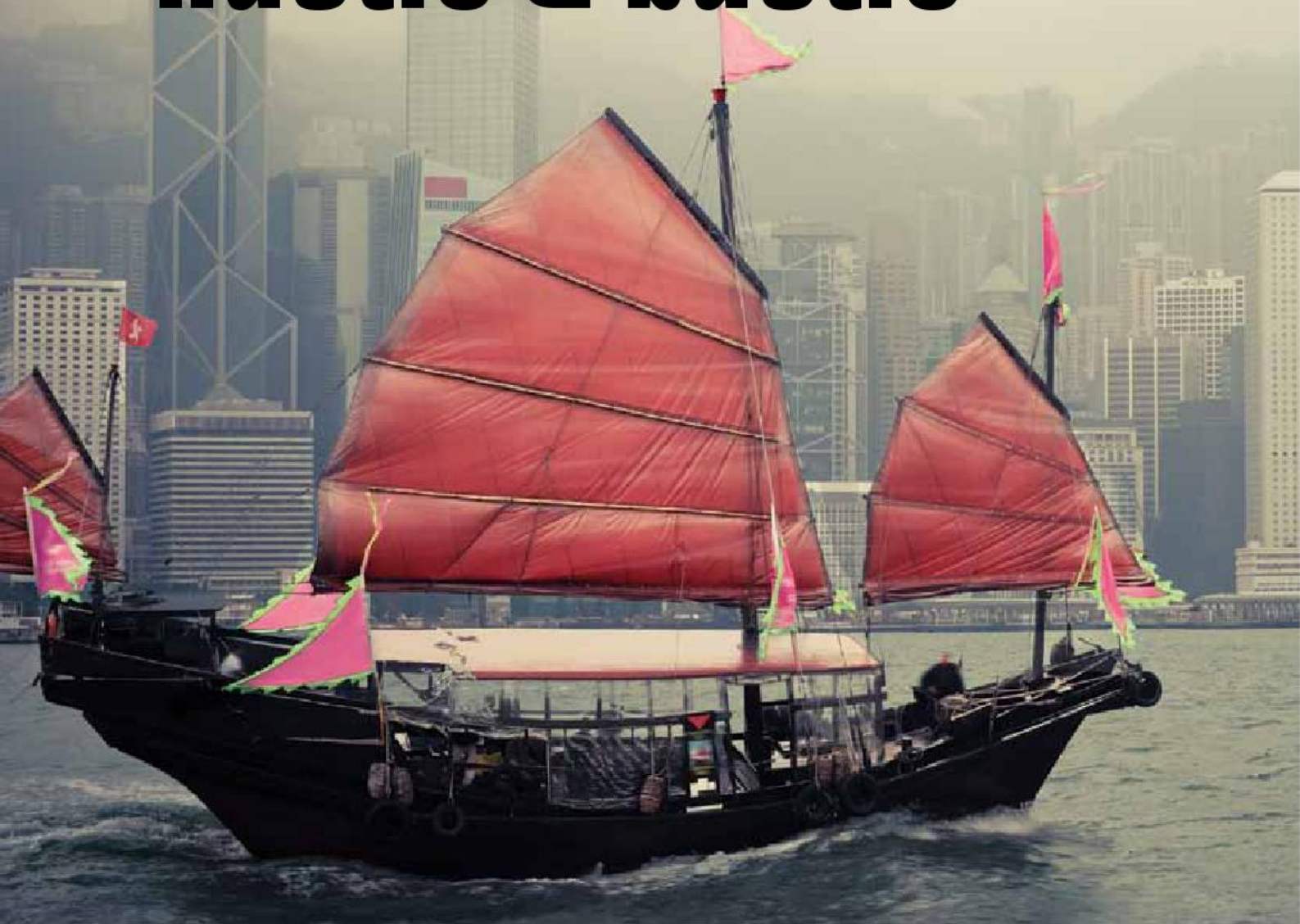
An art form of more than three hundred years old, Kathakali with its exquisite makeup and fantastic body movements has enchanted spectators all over the world. Kathakali took shape as an art form under the Raja of Kottarakkara, a small kingdom in the southern India. It later emerged as an icon of Kerala's culture and art.

Kathakali is noted for its elaborate facial makeup and realistic expression of human emotions. It even holds the world record for the thickest makeup applied for a performing artiste. It takes around five to six hours for an artist to get fully dressed for a whole night's performance. In the long makeup process, colour applied on the face of an artiste is very crucial. The characters in a Kathakali performance are identified through their facial makeup and its colour. Green colour applied on the face denotes a noble male character while anti-heroes are portrayed with a red streak on the face.

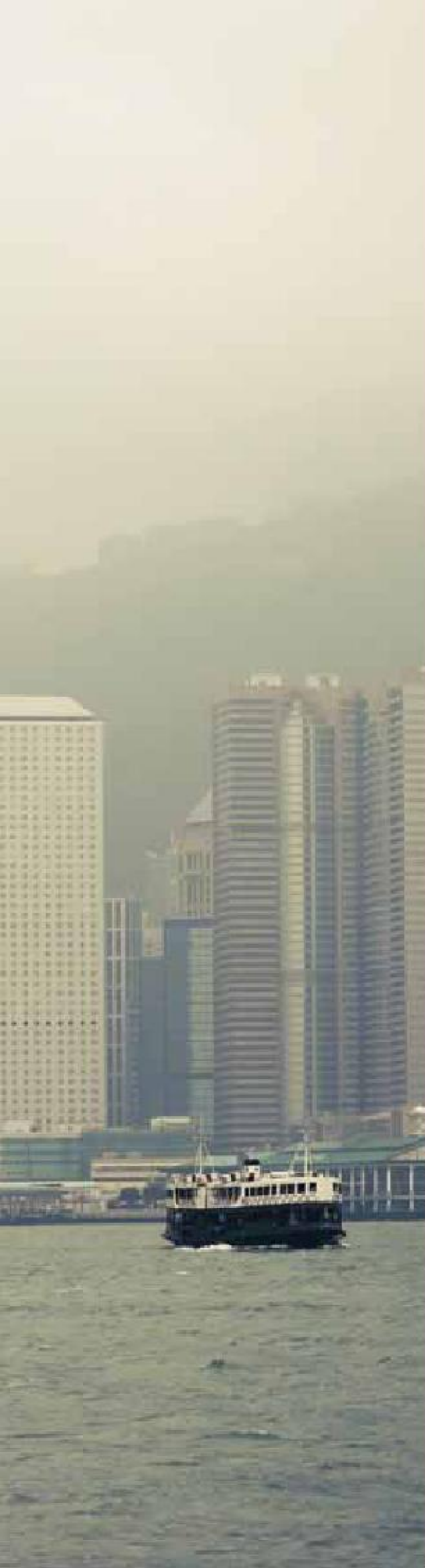
Here, Kalamandalam Gopi, a living legend in the Kathakali performance, is captured with makeup transforming into the mythological character Nala



Amid **Hong Kong's** **hustle & bustle**



Ever fancied a trip to a place like Hong Kong that rarely sleeps? The streets are alive with performances of martial arts and rehearsals of carol songs. Shops and food outlets are full of customers and people patiently await their turn in long queues in the days before Christmas and New Year celebrations



| Pramod Kanakath |

A teeming million flows in a flawed rhythm through a busy street in Kowloon. The days before Christmas bring more and more people from Mainland China and the other South-East Asian countries to the bustling city. The spirit of the season adds to the pleasant experience of shopping that Hong Kong is famous for. Temperature is highly volatile and demands different types of clothing for protection. From a relatively cold 15 degrees on a Thursday, it plummets to 9 the next day and hops on to 12 on weekend. It's the perfect time for ladies (and gentlemen) to flaunt their haute couture in boots, mufflers, gloves and coats. The malls are known for shopping the branded items which display the luring festival discount tags. Then again, some stores restrict entry to only 20-25 at a time to dispel unpleasant crowding.

A stroll in the streets near MongKok in Kowloon takes you to some interesting sights like performances in the middle of the road. Some of these streets are vehicle-free to enable uninterrupted walk. A few feet away, there's a chorus rehearsing Christmas songs. Pretty ladies and tall gentlemen sing spiritedly watching the conductor's baton movements. Many around them are delighted in taking video of their pre-performance. They resume after a few minutes and go on achieving perfection. Just on the other side of the chorus, there are some attention-seeking teenage girls and boys holding placards which read "Free hugs and kisses". What better warmth in the cold!

We snake our way through the crowd, often pushed to reluctantly separate hand-locked couples and ambling families. In an adjoining street, we find people who have appetite. The display table reveals snacks and vegetables which are curious in appearance with rainbow colours. In the meat section, the

more familiar ones are beef, pork, chicken, octopus legs and squid, all grilled and placed tantalizingly. The coloured ones, a local customer explains to us, are tofu fried in different sizes and shapes, fried vegetables like capsicum, aubergine and tomatoes added as savories to snacks made of meat. Food galores in such variety that naming all of them would even challenge Ling and Cathy. Sugarcane, mango and orange juice bottles are stacked up nearby. We need to eat, but we may come back later as these food outlets serve beyond midnight.

Another turn and we come to Ladies' Market. The crowd here appalls me, but the prospect of bagging some cheap souvenirs eliminates the concern. Discounts are there so that women are all over it. In the multi-storied complex, there is a maze where maneuvering the exits and entrances is a game of dexterity. Many shops are identical with their uniform façade and displays. You hardly recognise these shops even if you traverse the same corridor twice.

It's a gargantuan shopping realm with pigmy prizes. The purchase is done and we decide to move on. After winding and winding, we climb down the last stairs to reach the ground floor and walk across the street to Sai Yeung Choi Street where electronics stage yet another show. Huge television screens glitter, cameras flash, sophisticated computers brag about the state-of-the-art tag.

I wake up to a cold morning and gaze at the hanging laundry in the balconies of flats in the nearby apartments. Wet and dry clothes modify many facades, blocking window views. Further on the right is a Buddhist temple in front of which is a lady praying with lit incense sticks closer to her forehead and the holy smoke-releasing ends pointing to the sky. Right beneath me, pedestrians wait for the green signal at the zebra crossing. A million again, appearing to re-enact the same rhythm. Life warms up on a cold early morning. ■



Dreams come true at

Disney Land

T&F Correspondent

“Be a kid and fly around,” that was the tour guide’s advice for us before stepping into the spectacular Disney Land. With an unbound excitement, we entered Disney Land. It is a completely different world for us. From a distance, we could hear the sound of Walt Disney World railroad which takes a 20-minute scenic tour around the theme park on antique steam-powered engines. Perhaps, the icing on the cake came in the form well-loved Disney characters- Mickey, Mini, Donald, Daisy, Goofy and Pluto waving at guests. After a long hiatus of photo session with them, we moved off to explore the five Disney Worlds with fun and frolic awaiting us at Fantasy Land, Tomorrow Land, Adventure Land, Main Street and Toy Story Land.

Main Street resembles USA of the early 1950s. If

you are an ardent lover of space mysteries, then Tomorrow Land is for you! There are various rides and games which were literally out of the world. Adventure Land takes you into the forest, rivers, tree houses, waterfalls and what not. One will be spellbound by some tribal music. We enjoyed the raft ride to Tarzan Island across the jungle river which is, a giant play area, featuring Tarzan’s Tree house. We had an encounter with elephants, hippos, crocodiles and cannibal tribes there.

Fantasy Land was a place where girls could squeal in delight at the fairy castle which is the main attraction. Everyone was gathering in the main street. “Time for fireworks!” someone said aloud. And thus began the famous fireworks of Disneyland which was really a magic in the dark sky. Before going for a quick shopping in the main street, we said goodbye to the unique world of Disney Land. ■



Hong Kong is the one country that has more Rolls Royce’s per person than any other place in the entire world.

As a traditional practise the people of Hong Kong eat long noodles on their birthday. It is believed that the longer the noodles the longer they live.

Getting There

Hong Kong International Airport, also known as Chek Lap Kok, is the major airport in Hong Kong. It has got regular services to all major cities around the world.

Weather

The best time to visit Hong Kong is between October and December



Romancing with orchid flowers

The National Orchid Garden of Singapore is yet another floral beauty that captivates the imagination of visitors. Welcome to acres of orchid garden that emanates scent in and around



Lakshmi Narayanan

The Singapore Orchid Garden stretching over three acres of land on the highest hill in the Singapore Botanic Gardens is a place to indulge in romantic moments in the beautiful background of blooming orchids. Three acres of magnificent orchids provide a setting for over 1,000 species and 2,000 hybrids, with about 600 species and hybrids on display.

The Orchid Garden in its impressive design displays plants in four separate colour zones: the “spring” zone with its bright and lively shades of gold, yellow and creams. The “summer” zone presents its major tones of strong reds and pinks. The “autumn” zone shows matured shades and the “winter” features whites and cool blues. The garden offers free admission for students during the first week of every school term holidays in March, June, September and November.

Those who come here admire the beauty and enjoy the diversity and richness of the gardens. It opens at 8.30 am and closes at 7 pm. For refreshment, Burkill Hall and The Garden Refreshment Kiosk are located near the entrance to the National Orchid Gardens.

Getting There

By Car: Parking facilities are available at the Botany Centre, Visitor Centre, Bukit Timah Core, Jacob Ballas Children’s Garden and along Tyersall Avenue

By Bus: Via Holland Road



India's one and only meteorite crater



India's only meteorite crater is located at Lonar in Central Maharashtra. The crater is the third largest on Earth, and the author takes a journey to Lonar to personally find out the universal wonder



Photos & Text
George Thengummoottil

I started my trip on a train from Mumbai. My first destination was Aurangabad, 370 km east of Mumbai, a city well known for ancient forts and Ajanta and Ellora Caves. This train journey across the Western Ghats was one of the most memorable experiences, crossing

misty hills, barren landscapes and beautiful valleys. As it was just after monsoon, the hills were exquisitely beautiful with waterfalls and greenery all around. The tiny flowers of wild plants all over the hill slopes in red, blue and yellow enhanced the beauty of the land. We travelled through many underground tunnels and long bridges along the rail route which gets blocked frequently during monsoons due to landslides.

It was already noon when I reached Aurangabad and I continued my trip to Lonar by a state bus. I passed through many villages that resembled the scenes in Hindi movies of 70s. The well maintained roads presented a comfortable travel and then a siesta till I reached the Lonar town by late evening.

I set out for Lonar early in the morning after a refreshing night's sleep. The crater is located in the west of the town and I walked in the direction of the crater. A narrow street packed with small houses and shops either side and busy bylanes

were what welcomed me in the town. Most of the houses were pretty much old made with mud and wood. There were even multi-storey houses made with mud and reinforced with wooden planks.

After a walk of one kilometer, I reached the brim of the crater. For a moment, I stood still thinking whether I was watching a science fiction or I was on a different planet. It was exactly what we see in the science fiction movies. There was a huge lake with green water in the bottom. The sound of kids screaming behind reminded me that I was still on earth.

Dhara, a natural stream, and a lake on the edge of the crater were the source of drinking water for the people of Lonar. It is considered holy and is proved to have medicinal values. The water flows down into the crater lake with a cascade of waterfalls. I walked down the steps leading to the lake. The edge of the crater was steep and dry with no trees, exposing the soil and broken rocks. With every step down, I felt like I was sinking into the earth.

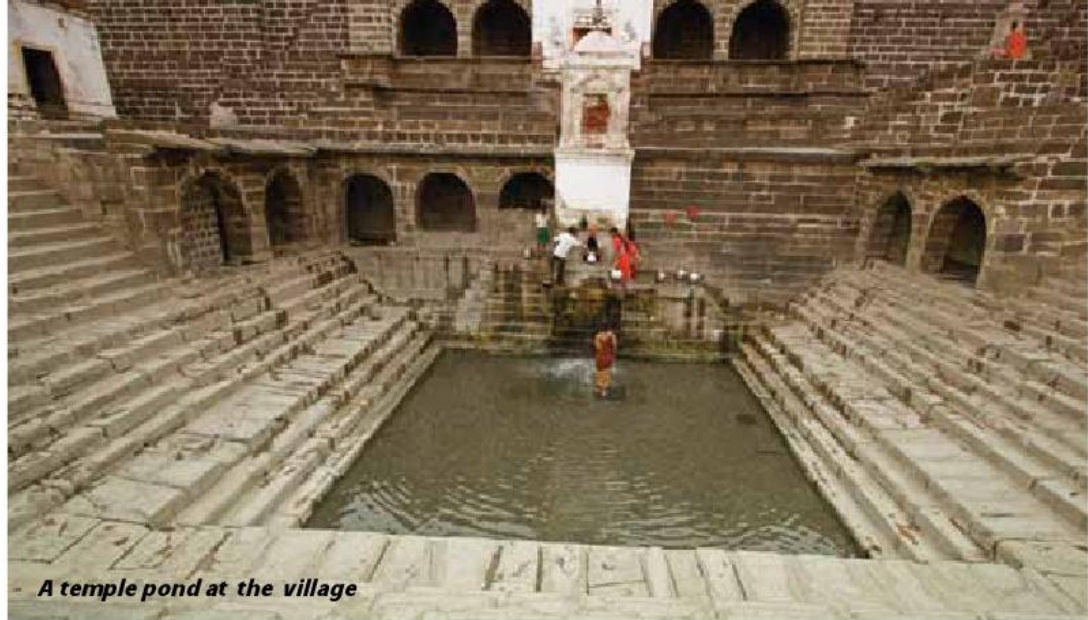
It took a little more than half an hour to reach the bottom of the crater. A look above was just like looking up from the bottom of a well. A narrow track along the circumference of the inner brim of the lake formed due to silt deposit is used by visitors to walk around the lake. This track connects more than 12 temples built on the banks. Pilgrims visit most of these temples frequently and poojas are conducted regularly. A few of the ruined and partially submerged temples are home to macaques and bats. They resembled the Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*.

As a wildlife enthusiast, the crater was found to be more interesting to me. The lake was surrounded by the forest except for a small patch of agriculture land. Lapwings and hornbills were regular sights, peafowl and langurs were busy disturbing the silence. Many birds flew across,

including bee-eaters, egrets, storks, magpie robins and many more.

There are references about the Lonar lake in ancient scripts like *Skanda Puran* and *Padma Puran*, but it was shown to the modern world in 1823 by a British officer, JE Alexander. Soon after its discovery, it attracted casual tourists as well as members of the scientific community from across the world. The Geological Society of India has conducted extensive studies on the site.

The crater is believed to have been formed about 55,000 years ago due to the impact of a meteorite with 60 metres in diameter weighing a million tons. This resulted in the release of tremendous heat which melted the rock forming the crater. It is believed that the meteorite has been buried some 600 metres below the ground. Several stones which float on water in the lake have been found with magnetic properties. Many people at Lonar have collected crystals, both transparent and colorful, from the crater. ■



A temple pond at the village



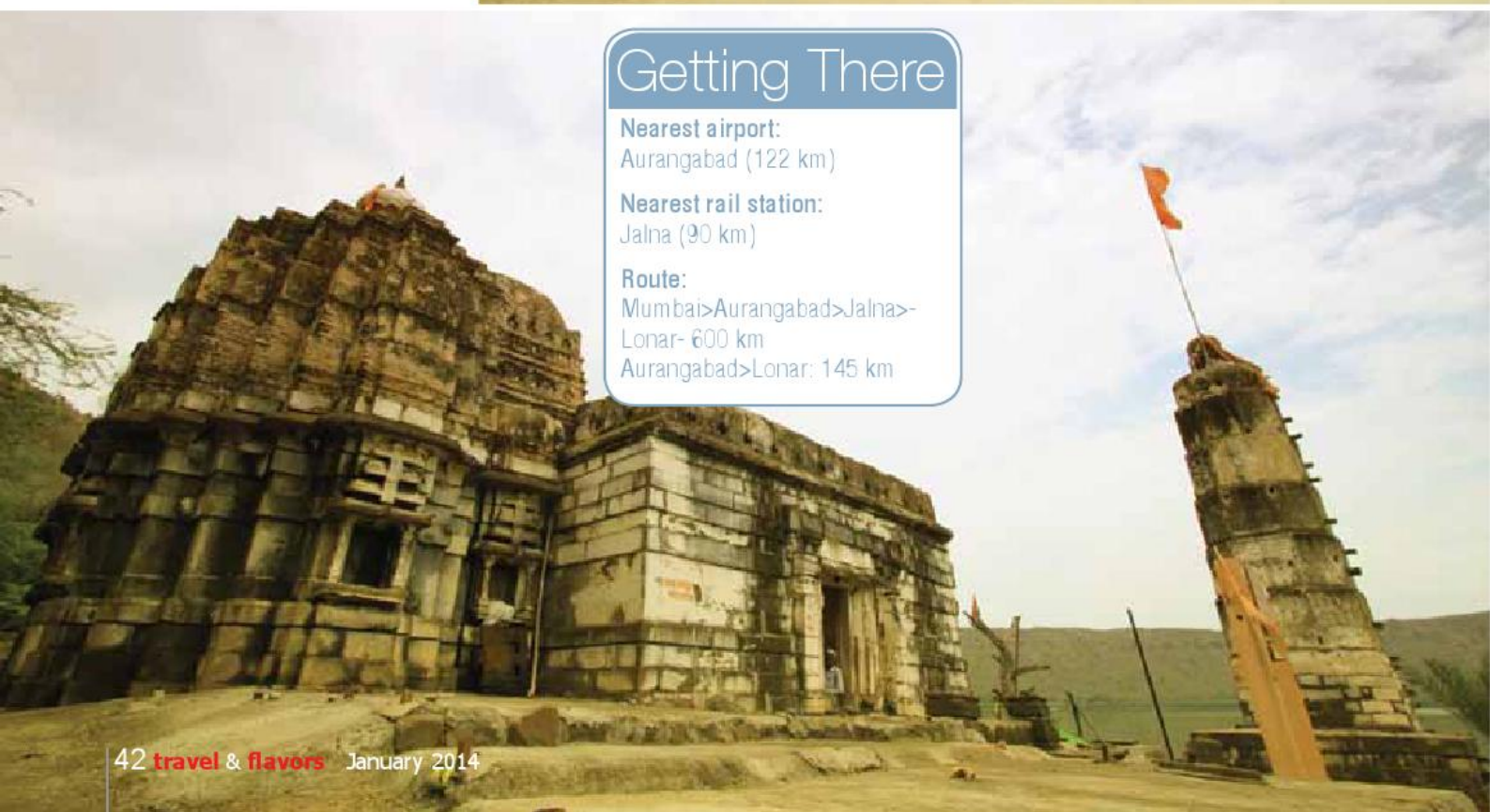
A house in Lonar village

Getting There

Nearest airport:
Aurangabad (122 km)

Nearest rail station:
Jalna (90 km)

Route:
Mumbai>Aurangabad>Jalna>
Lonar- 600 km
Aurangabad>Lonar: 145 km





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FUSION Naga dishes



Festivities aren't really complete without food and drink and a stay in Kohima, Nagaland, during Hornbill Festival. The festival is an indulgence in Naga delicacies.

Jenny Thingshung

I had never had so much of Naga cuisine in different tribal styles here. It was gastronomically a high point. The Nagas are known to have an eclectic diet. So, the food market is not for the faint-hearted. With dishes as diverse as frogs, grasshoppers and worms, one needs to be adventurous and have the taste buds of a Naga.

Amateur and professional Naga chefs line up in the kitchen alongside an Australian master chef and cook fusion Naga dishes for judges. The high point was the herbs and spices used were all indigenous. Chefs cooked creative and delicious pork, smoked pork, chicken and fish dishes, and presented in an attractive manner. Naga cuisine is gradually gaining popularity in the world.

As the sun touches the lofty Jafu Mountain, the cultural shows of the day were replaced with high bonfire, loud laughter and beautiful folk songs along with the barbecue smoke that rises high

up. It is time to down indigenous Naga rice beer (zothu/thuthse) in bamboo mugs and buffalo horns along with hot juicy pork barbecue and fried grasshoppers for that indigenous touch.

The Hornbill festival was as much as a food carnival. While visitors wanted to savour the hot and sour Naga dishes, smoked pork with fermented fish by chef Imna in Naga Stall was by far the best I had. Chef Gilbert Humtsoe's khore (Naga style steam fish with Perilla paste and indigenous Naga spices) was unique and the best for people who don't like spicy food.

Rattles and Hum, a lounge in Central Kohima, is a decent place to crash with your groupie for some gossip, mug full of beer, chicken pakora and of course soft music. Later, we landed in the lone disco in Kohima called Naga Garden, a beautiful and natural setting. With tree houses, bonfire and dance floor, it was an idyllic place to just be after the entire hustle bustle of the festival.

1



1. *Fried grasshoppers*
2. *Kho Re (Traditional Naga steamed fish with perilla paste and indigenous Naga spices)*
3. *Naga rice beer (thuthse) in bamboo mug*
4. *Simple Naga serving*
5. *Fusion Naga dish. Chicken with sticky rice*

5



4



2



3





Stay & dine in royal style

Relish modern luxuries and the beauty of lakes as well as mountains while staying at a palatial hotel. Except for the grand Leela Palace Udaipur, it is possible only in your dreams and fairytales

Tony William

Udaipur's rich heritage and grandeur are truly reflected in the Leela Palace.

Designed by Bill Bensley, one of the world's top architects, the traditional arts and crafts inspired by the rich cultural heritage of Rajasthan adorn the palace and its surroundings. Feast your eyes with the regal beauty of the Outer Courtyard, which flanks Lake Pichola, featuring lush green lawns and manicured flower beds amidst artistically designed water bodies, fountains, stone sculptures and marble seating. The Leela is a perfect wedding destination and you may be lost in dreams of making your dream wedding come true

here. The Inner Courtyard has a magnificent fountain which turns into a splendid stage for Rajasthani folk performances by sunset amidst 120 lamps adorning the walls and intimate seating under the traditional Rajasthani umbrellas.

Seventy-two spacious rooms and eight lavish suites with elegant interiors provide a marvelous view of the Lake Pichola. An all-day multi-cuisine restaurant, a royal fine dining rooftop restaurant serving Indian cuisine, an intimate lounge, the pool overlooking the Lake Pichola, ESPA, India's only lake side tented luxury spa, and a top-of-the-line gym with personal trainers are just some of the facilities on offer at the Leela. For those looking to celebrate an event in grandeur

or planning a private meeting in inspirational surroundings, the palace offers several meeting rooms, a board room, a business centre, banquet halls and event spaces.

Royal accommodation

Maharaja Suite:

Live life not king size but 'Maharaja Size' at The Maharaja Suite at the Leela Palace Udaipur. Spread over an impressive 3,552 square feet, its plush interior has been adorned with fine arts and artifacts that weave a spell of luxury. It has also got an elegant living room, a dining area with exquisite hand-crafted silver furnishings and a study room. The beautifully embellished master bedroom has separate walk-in wardrobes,



a king-size bath tub with Jacuzzi, separate shower stall and water closet. This unique suite also boasts of its own ESPA massage parlour, a spacious plunge pool and sprawling courtyards for the discreet comfort of its distinguished guests. An interconnecting room is also available for accompanying guests. Every suite comes with a personalised 24-hour butler service.

Royal Suite: It is an exclusive suite on the third floor. The living room of the Royal Suite has been designed with a grand dome with an exquisite hand-painted gold and silver leaf work from an era when artisans would paint on a medium much grander

than a canvas. The master bedroom with a four-poster bed provides an intimate sanctuary complete with a bathtub and Jacuzzi. The spacious dining room with rich upholstery and carpet invites the guest to dine in a royal setting.

Duplex Suite: The master bedroom at Duplex Suite offers a view of the City Palace and other heritage structures. An open-air plunge pool and a Jacuzzi, a bathroom with a walk-in shower stall, a bathtub with a view of the Lake Pichola and a separate guest bathroom are some of the luxuries at the Duplex Suite.

Luxury suites and regular rooms: Spacious suites have finely



LUXURY HOTELS
THE LEELA PALACE UDAIPUR



Maharaja Suite living room

appointed living rooms replete with a work desk that leads to an elegant bedroom. The guest room provides a beautiful view of the lake or the heritage monuments around the hotel. All you have to do is open the curtains. One can select either lake view room or heritage view room.

Where to dine

All-day dining restaurant: Taste an eclectic mix of flavors from different corners of the world at the all-day dining restaurant overlooking the courtyard and the lake. The menu reflects appropriate time of day, the focus being on quality and freshness of ingredients. The service is praiseworthy. The restaurant flaunts the culinary talent of Executive Chef Kayzad Sadri.

Sheesh Mahal: The open-air specialty restaurant (operational only from October to March) overlooking the lake is a nice place to have your dinner. Amuse your taste buds

with exquisite Indian flavors under a sky full of stars in the gentle breeze from the lake.

The lounge bar: It is designed as a luxurious den with dark wood paneling, fireplaces, fine arts, books and collectible artifacts for guests. It serves refreshments, champagnes, time refined cognacs, single malts and vintage wines. Enjoy it along with Rajasthani folk dance every evening.

Personalised dining experience: A private dining experience created especially for you, by you, for a memorable and a romantic evening will certainly light up your stay. You can dine in a heritage building overlooking the lake Amrud Mahal or Guava Orchard. From exquisite décor comprising fresh flowers, mellow lighting and scented candles to live musicians, puppet shows and a carefully prepared menu with cuisines of one's choice, everything is individualised. ■

Rajasthani set meal at The Leela Palace Udaipur



Try your hand at

Explore the city on a bicycle if you want. The hotel provides bicycles or can arrange a tuk-tuk a The spa overlooking the Lake Pichola will soothe your mind and body.

For more information, log on to www.theleela.com

For reservations, call: 1 800 1031 444



Khumb ke galauti Kebab



Lamb biryani



Maas ke sule



Champagne breakfast





Destination

Australia

Anybody would like **Australia** as it is a melting pot of different cultures of the world. Pleasant weather and palatable dishes besides all modern amenities will, of course, charm you throughout your stay in the new nation

T&F Team

Officially known as the Commonwealth of Australia, the nation comprises the mainland of the Australian continent, Tasmania Island and a number of smaller islands. Though not intimidating in size or culturally diverse like Europe and the Americas, Australia has the charm that welcomes one and all. It is a place where you feel at home, where you get history and fun sightseeing all in one go. It is the world's sixth largest country and is one of the most powerful nations. Compared to many of the European nations, Australia as it is known today is relatively a new nation although there have



The path to Sydney Harbour Bridge

been aboriginal settlements in the land.

Ancient history

Human habitation in the continent possibly started around 42,000 years ago with the migration of people from what we now call South East Asia. The first recorded European sighting of the mainland is attributed to a Dutch navigator who sighted the coast of Cape York Peninsula in early 1606. It was in 1770 that James Cook sailed to the area now known as New South Wales. In 1780, the British government sent a fleet of ships under the command of Captain Arthur Phillip to establish a new penal colony there. A camp was set up and the British flag was hoisted at Sydney Cove, Port Jackson, on January 26, 1788. The historic moment is commemorated even today as Australia Day. The first settlement led to the foundation of Sydney and gradually economic development began to take place in and around the region. Territorial expansion began to take place with the passage of time and the last of the convict ships arrived in 1848.

Sydney Harbour

With so much to see and drool over, Sydney Harbour in New South Wales gets a large number of visitors every holiday season. The Sydney Opera House, often hailed as one of the most exciting buildings of the modern era, has been a popular centre of the performing arts in Sydney. The building along with the Sydney Harbour Bridge has become an iconic symbol of Australia. The shore of Sydney Harbour is also home to bunkers and forts many of which are now heritage sites. The forts consist of a number of tunnels, catacombs and underground rooms, making it a well visited historic spot in Sydney. A trip to the Watsons Bay would be the highlight of your stop at Sydney Harbour. Situated at the end of the South Head Peninsula, Watsons provides the best view across the harbour and is a perfect spot to relax in the evening.

Kangaroo Island

Kangaroo Island is one of the most popular tourist attractions of South Australia and brings in nearly 140,000 visitors annually. Located just 112 km southwest of Adelaide, the island is easily accessible by air and water. It gains fame from its exquisite wildlife and pristine beaches. Kangaroo Islands is the perfect place for those who want to let their worries go away by pampering yourself at the Southern Ocean Lodge, one of Australia's well known wilderness retreats. Catch the sea lions at the Seal Bay where you can go for ranger guided walks or spend the night under the stars at the Flinders Chase National Park or on a trip to the Little Sahara on the south coast. The Kangaroo



Aerial view of Gold Coast, Queensland

Island Penguin Centre at Kingscote and the Raptor Domain are the perfect places for you to indulge in a wildlife safari. For a glimpse of the famed Koala, you might be better off visiting the Hanson Bay Wildlife Sanctuary.

Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef is widely regarded as one of the wonders of the natural world. It has a rich tapestry of coral reefs, islands and cays. The Great Barrier Reef has been described as a tropical rainforest of the ocean owing to the intricate living environment and the marine diversity of the world's largest coral reef system, so large that it can be seen from space. It is composed of over 2,900 individual reefs and 900 islands stretching for almost 2,600 km and is located in the Coral Sea, off the coast of Queensland.

The reef supports a wide diversity of life and was chosen

as a World Heritage Site in 1981. It has been named among the seven natural wonders of the world. A large part of the reef is protected by the Great Barrier Reef Marine



70 % of the world's wool comes from Australia.

Australia has probably the lowest population density than any other country in the world. 30,028 square km of land in Australia is used as cattle ranch which is almost equal to the area of the whole of Belgium.

Park which helps to limit the impact of human use. The reef has been long known to the Aboriginal Australians and the Torres Strait Islanders who consider it to be a part of their cultural and spiritual life. The reef has become a very popular destination for tourists over the years. You get the chance to explore the reef by using a private helicopter or a plane ride or perhaps indulging in water sport activities like diving and snorkelling as well.

Great Ocean Road

The Great Ocean Road is one of Australia's greatest road-trip destinations with picturesque coastal towns and spectacular views at every turn. More than 20 million years old magnificent natural rock structures like the world-famous Twelve Apostles are among them. The Surf Coast Walk connects you with the coastal town comforts of Torquay, Anglesea and





Sydney Opera House

Aireys Inlet. Marvel at the beauty of Bells Beach cliffs, the deep blue of Bass Strait and the leafy green of eucalypt forests.

The Great Ocean Walk on Victoria's spectacular west coast, stretching over 100km from the idyllic resort town of Apollo Bay, is equally rewarding. The Otway Forests, Walks and Waterfalls tour, Australia's oldest lighthouse-Cape Otway Light Station and Otway Fly Treetop Walk, the longest and tallest elevated walk of its kind in the world, are adventures awaiting you there. The Great Ocean Road is also the track for Australia's most stunning marathon-The Great Ocean Road Marathon.

Uluru, the northern territory

The spiritual heart of Australia, Uluru Ayers Rock is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Considered sacred to the Anangu, the aboriginal people of the area, this large sandstone rock formation and its surroundings are home to a plethora of springs, waterholes, rock caves and ancient paintings. Located approximately 40km west of Uluru, the ochre shapes are intriguing and mesmerizing. There are a number of walking trails available to explore the panoramic view of the domes. To explore you have plenty of options- walk, drive, travel on top of a camel or take a helicopter and wonder at the magnificent views of the Canyon rim, the weathered domes of the Lost City and the Garden of Eden.

Gold Coast

Australia's Gold Coast lures tourists with its superb beaches, including the world renowned 'Surfers Paradise'. The Gold Coast is the gateway to some of Queensland's best natural attractions. Whale-watch, island-hop and discover the area's aboriginal culture are the main attractions. Travel west and you'll find one of Australia's most biologically diverse regions, the lush rainforest-cloaked hinterland with World Heritage-listed national parks such as Lamington, Border Ranges, Main Range and Nightcap. Along the way you will soon discover the treasures that make this coast precious.

Wine Glass Bay

Tasmania's most iconic destination is Wine Glass Bay shaped as the name suggests like a wineglass. Rugged pink granite mountains, dazzling white sand beaches and sapphire blue waters define the Freycinet



COVER STORY
AUSTRALIA

↑
↓
DRIVE
ON LEFT
IN AUSTRALIA

45
km/h

Great Ocean Road

Peninsula on Tasmania's east coast. The Wine Glass Bay is also one of the top 10 beaches in the world. The secluded Wineglass Bay is a part of the Freycinet National Park on the east coast of Tasmania. Enjoy the flora and fauna of the park, including the brushtail possum, ringtail possum, sugar glider, eastern pygmy possum, little pygmy possum, echidna, wombats, New Holland mouse, swamp rat, water rat, Tasmanian bettong and the long-nosed potoroo. Southern right whale, humpback whale and bottlenose dolphins are known to use the bay to feed, calve and take rest. Enjoy the beauty of the Hazards, pink granite peaks forming the park's dramatic backdrop.



A variety of fish and colourful coral in the Great Barrier Reef



Kangaroo Island

Food and wine

Australia offers a wide range of culinary advantages for travelers. The culinary fare that you get here is compatible with other world famous dishes. The stunning weather and the outstanding natural beauty of the place add more taste to its flavors. Dining at Sydney Harbour is a marvelous experience for tourists. Melbourne, Yarra Valley, Mindil Beach and Adelaide are the best places to experience the Aussie delicacies.

Philipp Island

Philipp Island, situated 140 km south east of Melbourne is a place where natural beauty goes hand in hand with culture and manmade wonders. A 640-meter concrete bridge connects the mainland town

San Remo with the island town Newhaven which is the main attraction here. The southern and western coasts of the island lie within the Phillip Island Important Bird Area. Penguins are the main attraction here.

Cricket Arenas

Cricket is always there in the blood of Australians. So the stadiums in Australia are a great place for cricket enthusiasts across the world. The well known cricket arenas in the world include the Sydney Cricket Ground and the Melbourne Cricket Ground & National Sports Museum. All these attract countless number of visitors every year. The International Cricket Hall of Fame in Bowral, Sir Donald Bradman's home town, is a major cricket attraction here. ■

Getting There

Melbourne and Sydney Airports serve as the major terminals for international and domestic flights. Qantas Airways which is the official carrier of Australia, operates flights to these airports from major Indian cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore

Weather

Best time to visit Australia is in spring (September to November) and autumn (March to May) seasons



My favourite destination

Shahnaz Husain

I love to travel, whether it is on vacation or business. Travel adds a wonderful dimension to one's life and personality. It enriches our experience and broadens our outlook. One gets a feel of the history and culture of the place. Travel can make you refresh. After my hectic schedules, there is nothing more enjoyable than getting away to a place where I can unwind. It also means meeting new people and seeing places of scenic beauty or historical interest.

Last place I visited

The last place I visited was London, which remains my favourite holiday destination. I have travelled extensively, but London, with its old charm, is my favourite place for business, relaxation and sight-seeing. It is actually a home away from home. London is a sightseer's delight. I love everything about it, especially long walks in the beautiful Hyde Park. It is an epitome of peace and tranquillity. The Speaker's corner provides a deep insight into diverse topics. Serpentine Lake has these beautiful swans. A sight to behold and a beautiful experience!

A journey of discovery

I would like to mention my trip to Egypt, where I discovered the splendour of ancient monuments, which I had heard about, but never



seen. I was transported back in time. They represent some of the greatest architectural achievements in the world. The three large pyramids at Giza and the Sphinx are truly spectacular. They took my breath away. Words cannot do justice to the sheer size, splendour and mysterious aura of the Sphinx. It has to be seen to be believed. It was totally awe-inspiring. I also discovered the bazaars of Cairo, specially the Khan el Khalini, with its maze of lanes, where you can pick beautiful souvenirs and artefacts, from mother of pearl to leather articles, clothing and jewellery. I also discovered the fascination of sitting at a pavement café and watching the world go by, not to mention the delicious fruit juices, dates, pink oranges and kababs at street side rotisseries.

Shopper's delight

My favourite shopping destination is London. I loved Oxford Street and Carnaby Street with their world class stores. I went there to shop and window shop. Handbags are a favourite to me and during this trip I bought several. They are a compulsory accessory and

also make a style statement. For me, Sunday shopping at Petticoat Lane was fascinating. Here, one can find something for everyone, from clothes to household goods and knick knacks at a bargain!

Sightseer's delight

Trafalgar Square, another favourite tourist destination, is located in the heart of London. What I really enjoyed is "Café on the Square" right in the middle of Trafalgar Square, where we sat over coffee and watched the world go by. One can't help but be touched by history here. Picadilly and Trafalgar Square are our favourite haunts at night. The twinkling lights are so inviting. What I really enjoyed this time is taking a day long cruise in the River Thames as it weaves its way through the heart of London. One is confronted by history at every bend. From here, one can experience the sights and splendour of this great city.

A memorable incident

One incident during our travels is most memorable. My husband

and I had just landed in Paris and he went to the counter to cash Travellers Cheques while I was having a cup of coffee. He turned around to take out his pen from his briefcase and found that the briefcase had vanished. It was a real calamity, because it contained all our travel documents, traveller's cheques, credit cards etc. We had not yet converted our money into French Francs. We didn't even have a coin to make a phone call. With the smattering of French that I knew, I explained to Starbucks why I couldn't pay for my coffee! Then we took a taxi to the Indian Embassy. I spoke to the Ambassador and borrowed money to pay the taxi! Our Embassy was like an oasis in the middle of a desert. They were most helpful. They arranged to reach us to our hotel and stood guarantee for us till our travel documents, traveller's cheques and credit cards were issued. I still remember that night we were walking down Champs Elysees at 1 am totally penniless! I spent one evening without any money at all, dreaming of a cup of hot steaming coffee! ■



Splendour of Hampi

With hundreds of monuments in ruins, Hampi remains an architectural wonder for the modern world. A visit to the ancient kingdom of Vijayanagara will give you glimpses of the exceptional skills of artisans who lived here in the centuries gone by



Photo Courtesy: Rajesh Rajan

Richi Mohanty

Hampi is the gateway to the great ancient kingdom of Vijayanagara and it was also the capital of the kingdom. Spread across the hills and valleys are 500 monuments that include an assortment of temples, palaces, royal pavilions, ancient market street, aquatic complex and the list goes on. But what remains of these structures today are just basements, a few pillars and some portions of the buildings.

To get to Hampi is easy if you are in Bangalore, from where you have easy access

EXPLORING THE PAST HAMPI



Lotus mahal

to road transportation. Since the entire site is preserved, only home stay/guest house options are available within the site. If you wish for a grander stay, I'd suggest you look for hotels in Hospet, about an hour's drive from Hampi. But the charm of living amidst the ruins is something that I personally would not miss.

After a seven-hour long drive from Bangalore, we arrived at our comfortable guest house with a very caring host and hostess. For a very late lunch, we trudged into Mango Tree restaurant, quite famous in the area, which serves everything from Indian to Italian, Mexican, French and a lot more. Since Hampi is a famous historical site attracting lots of visitors from across the world, the restaurant was well accustomed to their tastes and the ambience was charming, with low floor seating within a bamboo

structure. Since the site has 500 monuments, it is not possible to visit all of them, so we made a list of things we want to see.

After stuffing ourselves and freshening up, we walked to the Virupaksha Temple to bow our head in front of the deity. The Virupaksha Temple is the oldest and the main temple in Hampi, located on the southern banks of Tungabhadra River. The temple has four gateways, with the primary access being from the Chariot Street, now popularly known as Hampi Bazaar. The Gopuram leads you to a vast courtyard. The Gopuram itself is made of decorated stones in the lower tier with bricks and mortar as the superstructure which is diminishing with time. A similar style of construction is followed throughout the Hampi site.

After visiting the temple, we started walking towards the nearby sites. Everything in



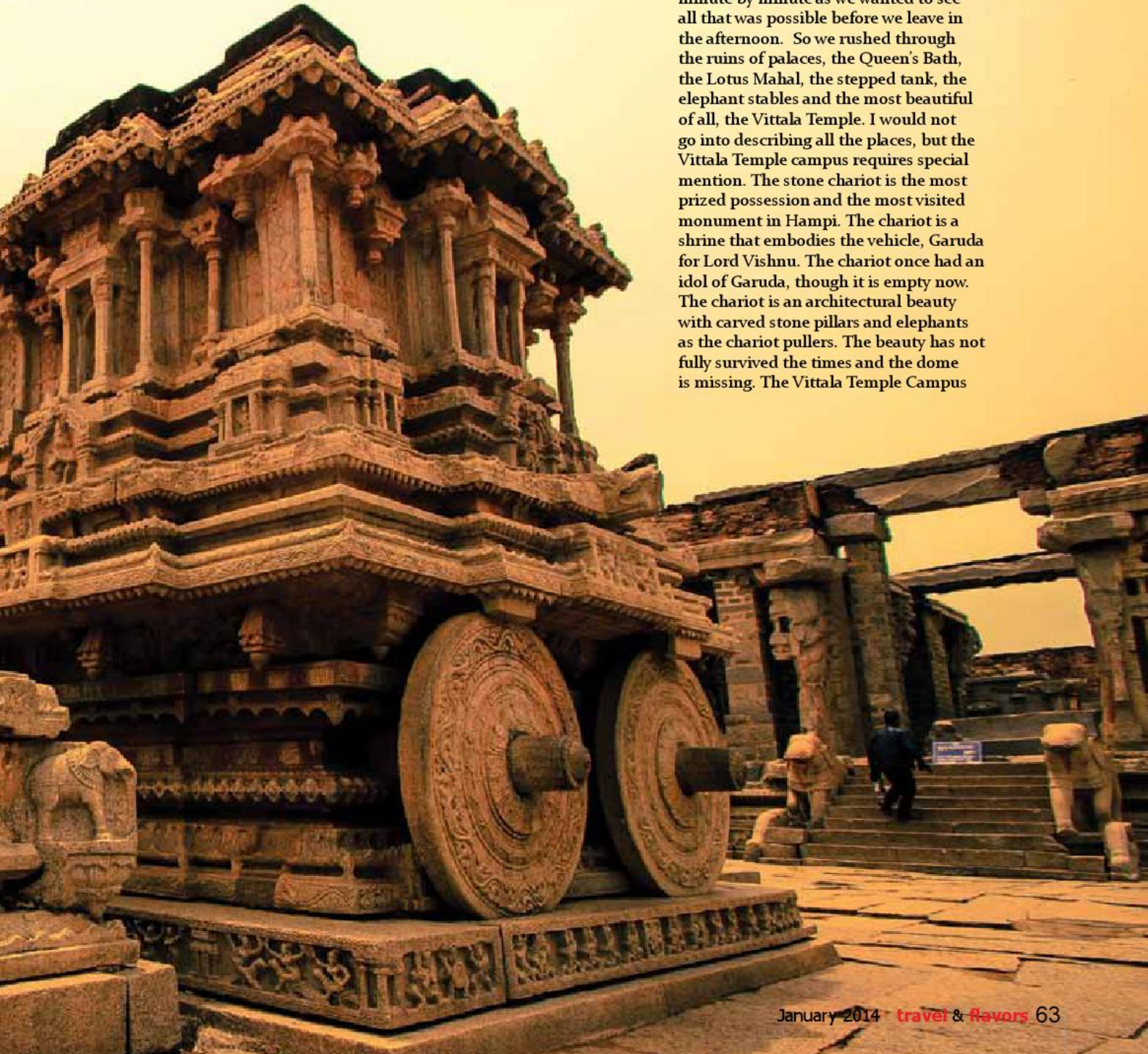
The stone chariot



Vittala Temple

Hampi is on a rock or made of rocks. The place boasts of the finer skills of artisans. Hampi is a quiet place full of stories and surprises. The day ended strolling in the bazaar and with what we always wanted to do- shopping. We even tried a new place for dinner- the Rooftop Café, which had a very warm and welcoming environment.

The next day was planned in detail, minute by minute as we wanted to see all that was possible before we leave in the afternoon. So we rushed through the ruins of palaces, the Queen's Bath, the Lotus Mahal, the stepped tank, the elephant stables and the most beautiful of all, the Vittala Temple. I would not go into describing all the places, but the Vittala Temple campus requires special mention. The stone chariot is the most prized possession and the most visited monument in Hampi. The chariot is a shrine that embodies the vehicle, Garuda for Lord Vishnu. The chariot once had an idol of Garuda, though it is empty now. The chariot is an architectural beauty with carved stone pillars and elephants as the chariot pullers. The beauty has not fully survived the times and the dome is missing. The Vittala Temple Campus





Getting There

Hospet is the nearest town to Hampi. Hospet has got good road and rail networks which connect Hampi to all major cities across the country

Weather

Best time to visit Hampi is between September and February

in itself is a spectacular sprawl with a number of halls and pavilions. Originally built in the 15th century, the temple had progressed under every new king. The halls boast of beautifully carved sculptures, monolithic columns and musical pillars. All you have to do is put your ears on one side of the pillar and ask a friend to lightly tap on the opposite end and you'll hear a melodious tune. The main temple has been decorated with motifs of lotus and the sanctum has a narrow passage all around (now filled with bats). The sanctum itself holds no idol now.

A little further down the temple campus is the Tungabhadra River bank from where one can take a boat to Anegundi, an extended family of Hampi. We missed this place due to the fact that we were out of time. Hopefully, we would see it next time. Every nook and corner of Hampi has been preserved and they all have a story to tell. All one has to do is settle down and calmly listen. The story of Hampi will unravel before you as you wish.

Travel Tip

In the Hampi area, you can hire a bike or a cycle as you can't cover the whole of Hampi by walking. ■



Stepwell opposite Krishna temple

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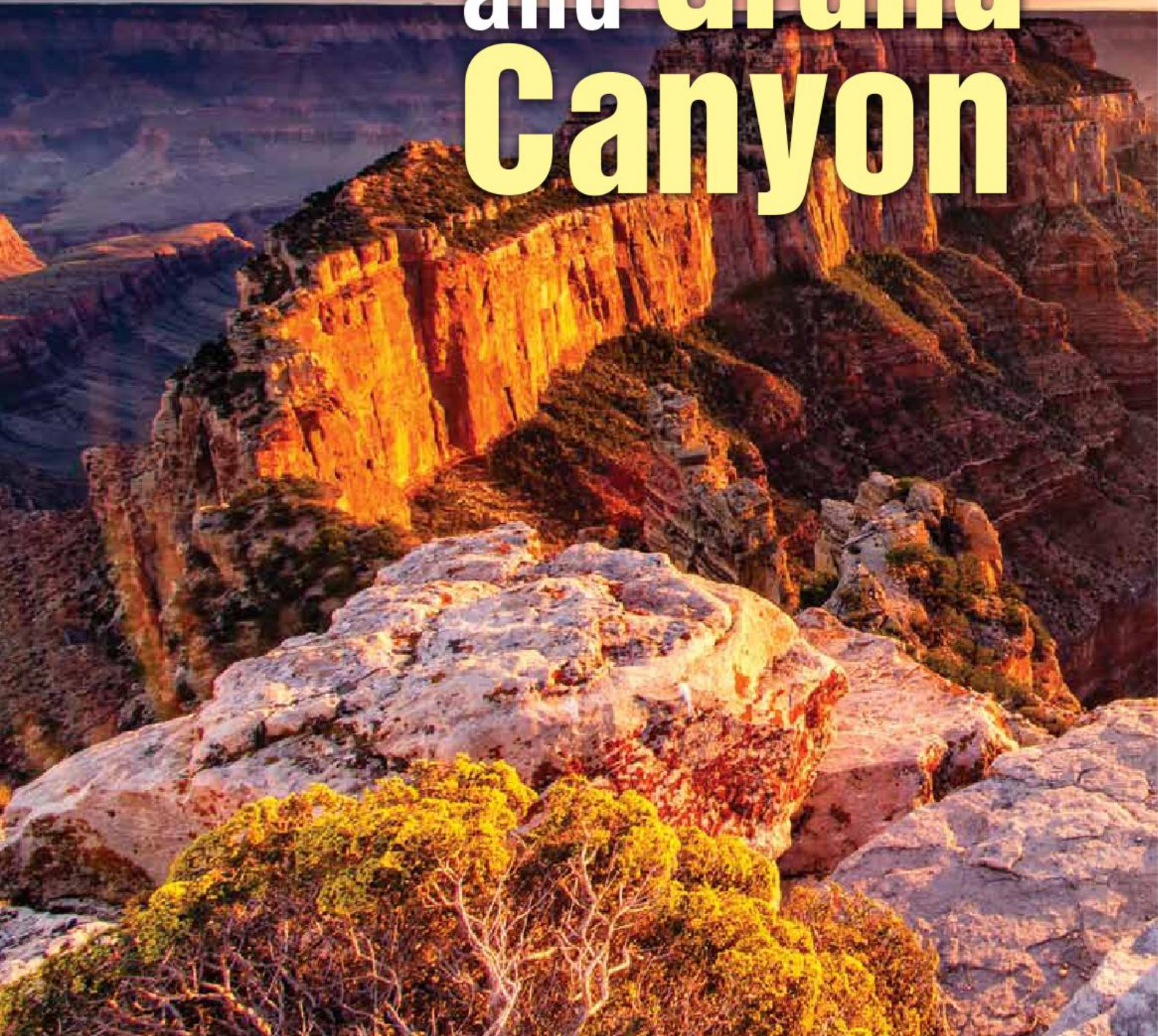
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TRIPPIN WITH SHWETA
HOOVER DAM

Breathtaking Hoover Dam and Grand Canyon



| Shweta Ganesh Kumar |

London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down," trills my toddler loudly, while strapped securely in her seat of our rented car. We are nearing what is officially known as the Mike O'Callaghan and Pat Tillman Memorial Bridge—an arch bridge over the Colorado River between the American states of Nevada and Arizona. Most people know that this massive bridge is the Hoover Dam Bridge. We are on our way from glittering Las Vegas to the Grand Canyon.

We've been on the road for a little more than an hour. A streak of grey tarmac that cuts through some of the most arid landscapes I've laid my eyes on. The painted mountains loom in the distance in all directions. Shrubs, dry, dusty green populate the panorama in patches. The last casino within Nevada, left behind a while ago, there is nothing to indicate human habitation in these parts. Then suddenly, there is some colour up ahead. We pass through fairly quickly, ogling at the shops selling trinkets, promising ourselves that we'll stop when we return.

Jolting us out of our wishes and dreams, an expanse of electric blue rises up on the horizon. Lake Mead which is the largest reservoir in the United States as far as the maximum capacity of water is concerned. The water is inviting. It is an oasis for our eyes after the parched feel of the Nevada desert, but we drive on to our first stop – the Hoover Dam. Leaving our vehicle at the very top of a winding, parking area, we make

our way down to the Discovery Centre. Backpacks and bags were x-rayed and searched and we were guided to a darkened theatre where a short video explained how this engineering marvel was built. Next, we were led into an elevator—unremarkable looking from outside. It took us down 530 feet into the bowels of the Earth in 70 seconds. A quick series of pops in your ears and a couple of gulps later, you exit into a tunnel drilled in the 1930s to the Penstock Viewing Platform. In a high-pitched voice, bored by repetitive intonations of the same information, the guide informs us that we are now on top of one of the four 30-foot diameter pipes that can transport nearly 90'000 gallons of water each second from Lake Mead to the dam's hydroelectric generators.

Without giving us time for the information to sink in, he escorts us back to the elevators, and up to the Nevada wing of the power plant. Jaws drop at the sheer depth of the 650 feet long Nevada wing and the massiveness of the eight generators that are housed here. Up on the observation deck, head reeling from the figures and the immensity of the structure and the boundless creative spirit of man, we watch the Colorado River as it winds its way to Lake Mead on a path proscribed by man. Inspired and awed, we set off again across the bridge and into Arizona, home to the desert and the Grand Canyon. The road wove off the main highway, closer and closer to the coral peaks in the distance.

Our vehicle zooms, then slows and clambers across the bumps on the road. It is thrown in the air by imperceptible

It is the Hualapai tribe that runs this part of the Grand Canyon— The Grand Canyon West. In an effort to showcase their culture, these Native Americans have set up villages at most sight-seeing points and also have cultural shows and performances

TRIPPIN WITH SHWETA HOOVER DAM

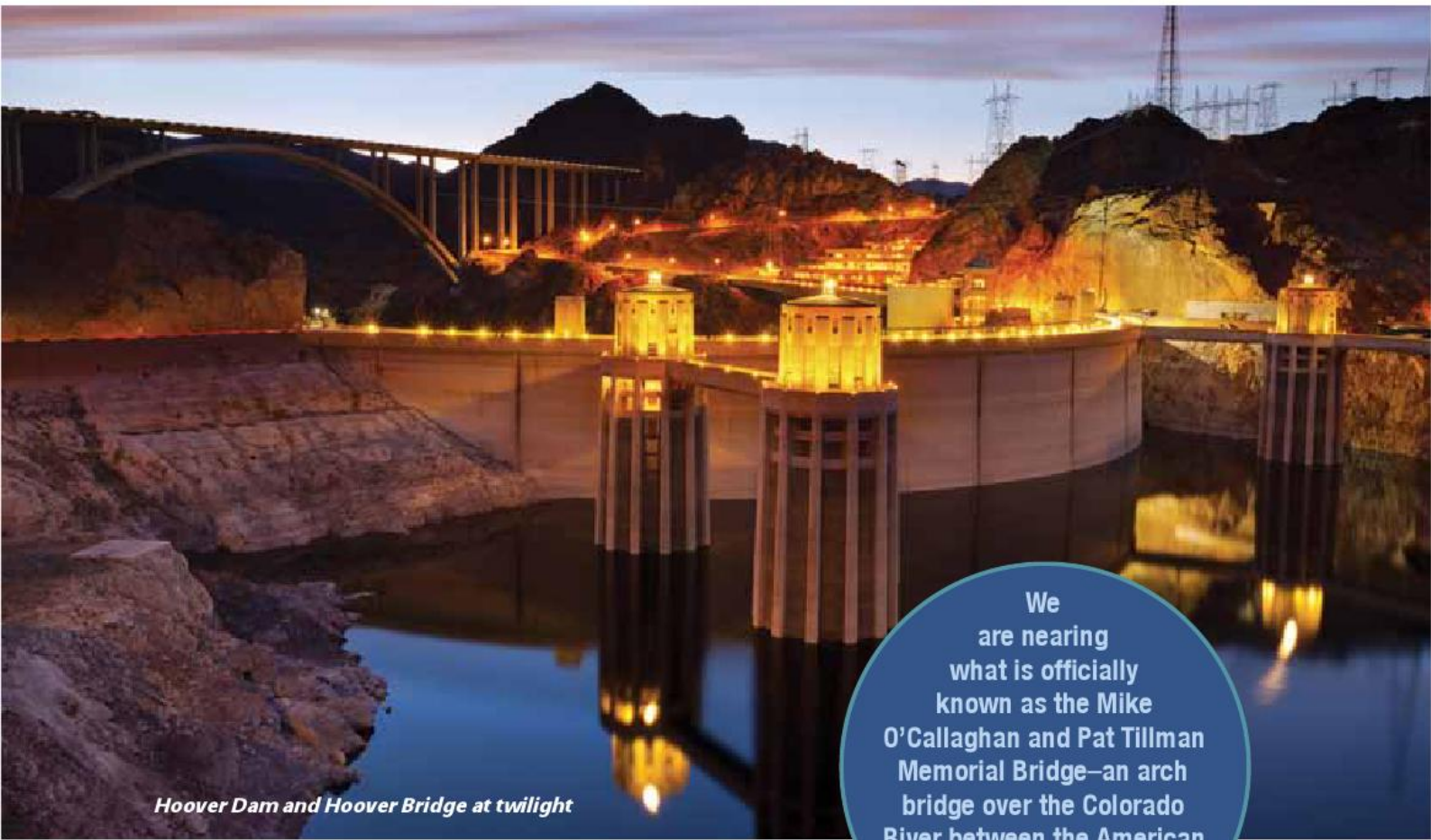


Panoramic view of Hoover Dam and bypass bridge

dips on the road. The Joshua trees have started to appear. These unique trees were named by early Mormon settlers, who were reminded of Joshua from the Bible, who raises his hands to the skies in prayer. Dust clouds start to surround us. The road has slowly transitioned from paved to a dirt path. We bump and roll around in the car, all drowsiness driven away. We turn our gazes outward to the landscape, which has changed again. Signage says that the Grand Canyon is near, but all we can see are burnt red rocky peaks and no ravines. We turn to a parking lot adjacent to a field with a tiny aircraft in it. Bundled up to protect ourselves from the sudden chilly winds, we walk towards the tourist centre to buy tickets.

It is the Hualapai tribe that runs this part of the Grand Canyon–The Grand Canyon West. In an effort to showcase their culture, these Native Americans have set up villages at most sight-seeing points and also have cultural shows and performances. A Hop-On Hop-Off shuttle took us to the first sight-seeing spot – Eagle Point. We got off and walked towards the edge where two college boys were whooping with joy as they tried to take selfies, posing by the Grand Canyon. We gingerly stepped over fissures and cracks and loose pebbles. Every step needed to be a sure-footed one. There are no protective walls or barriers, here at the west rim of the Grand Canyon. If you slip, it is a long way downward.

Taking a deep breath, I went as close to the edge as I dared and I looked down. My eyes trailed down the magnificent cliffs and rock faces – red, brown, coral, orange, purple, grey. They shimmered and shone as the sun rays fell on them from this way and that. Snaking its way through, far, far below was the force that helped shape the Canyon – The Colorado River, yet again. A breathtaking sight if there ever was one. Itching for a better view, we troop up to the Skywalk – a transparent,

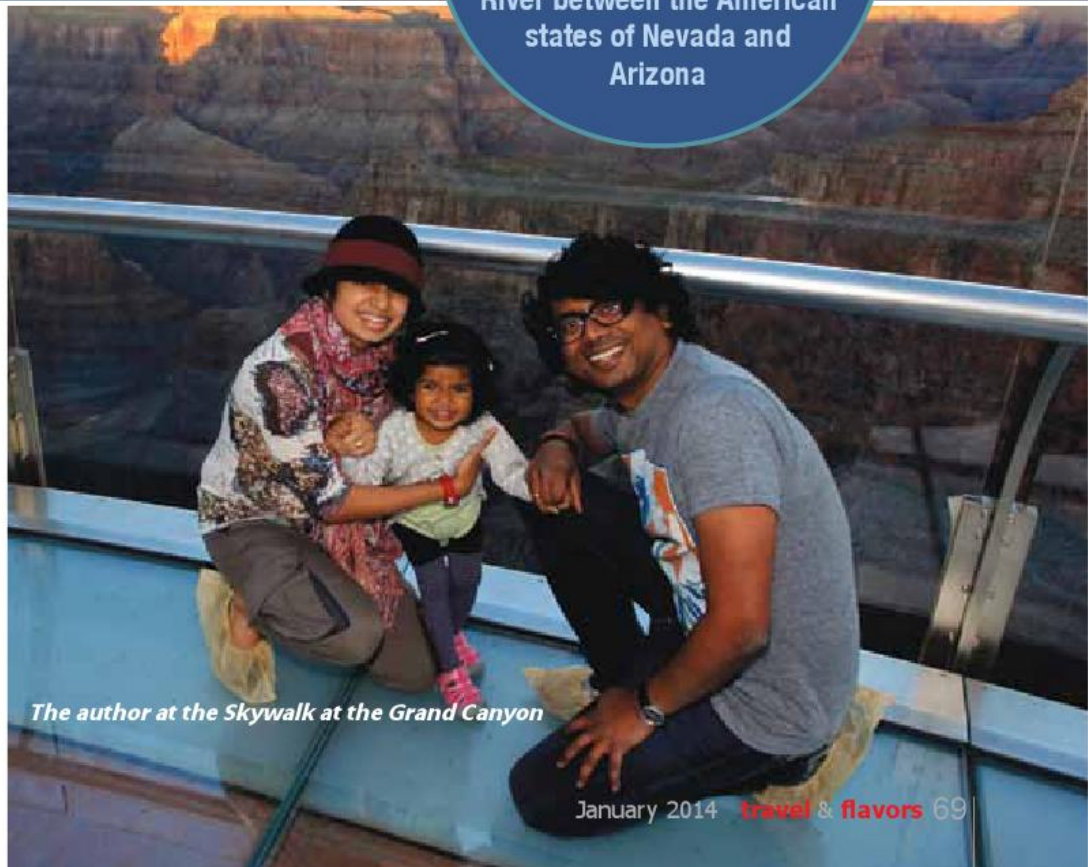


Hoover Dam and Hoover Bridge at twilight

We are nearing what is officially known as the Mike O'Callaghan and Pat Tillman Memorial Bridge—an arch bridge over the Colorado River between the American states of Nevada and Arizona

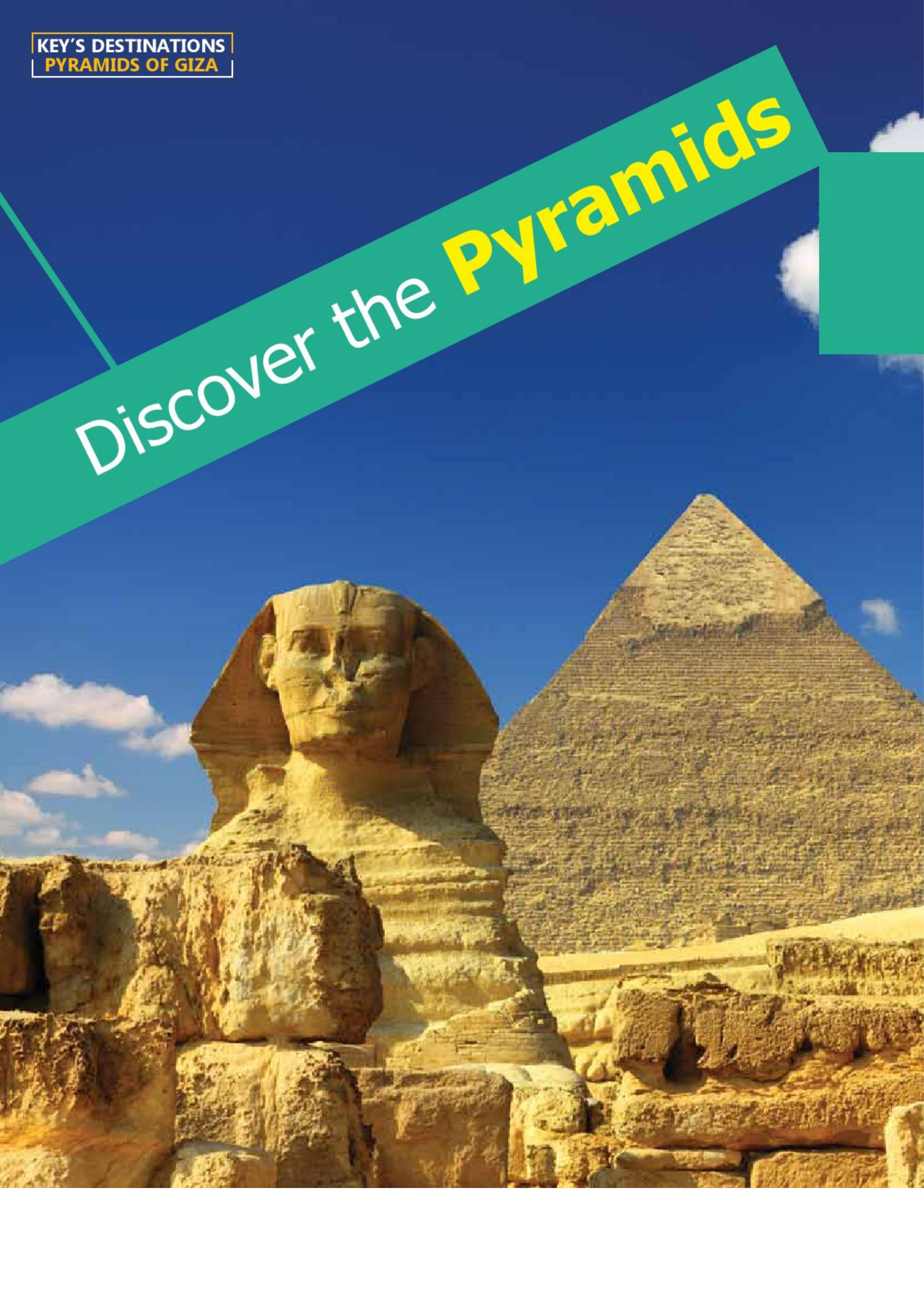
horseshoe-shaped cantilever bridge suspended above 4000 feet of pure air. Hearts pounding, we put on the protective covering on our footwear before walking on to the bridge. We were now literally walking above the Canyon, separated from it by a sheet of reinforced glass.

I squatted down and pressed my nose to the glass below. This trip had been one of contrasts- nature in all its magnificence, humbling and awe-inspiring coupled with man's indomitable need to leave his name and legacy behind. And as witness to it all was the Colorado River – at times fierce enough to cut through mountains and at others, compliant enough to be dammed in. ■



The author at the Skywalk at the Grand Canyon

KEY'S DESTINATIONS
PYRAMIDS OF GIZA



Discover the **Pyramids**

A journey to Giza to experience the architectural wonder—the Pyramids considered to be one of the world's most spectacular sights is a once in a lifetime opportunity. The Pyramids have fascinated generations of travellers coming to Egypt

As a business executive, I have been going around places looking for a bit of relaxation, longing for escape from where rules are well defined, and outcomes can be verified with the touch of a button. One day in late October 2012, I was standing outside one of the travel shops on my way to a meeting, when my gaze was caught by a big poster – “Enjoy a full day in Giza discovering one of the world's most spectacular sights: the Pyramids”. For some reasons, the hairs on my arm stood on end – this was an electric moment for me. I stood mesmerized contemplating an idea that was as hypnotic as the serpent that encircled the arm supposed to be Cleopatra's.

I arrived in Cairo the next evening with a small group of archaeology students from the University of Pennsylvania, with whom I was given a discounted rate. They were on this trip as part of their training, and I took that opportunity to learn with them. Not until the third day did we really get on with the trek to the Great Pyramids in Giza. Our first two days were spent “acclimatizing”. We first visited the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities to see a remarkable collection of artifacts dating back to 4000 BC that includes the treasures of the tomb of Tutankhamun and the Royal Mummies Room. After lunch, we next explored the bazaar of Khan El Khalili, where merchants hawk

Karnika E Yashwant

hand-crafted jewellery and piles of fragrant spices. Later, we discovered the graceful architecture of Islamic Cairo's historic mosques. When night came, we attended a welcome dinner at the hotel.

We enjoyed a full day in Giza discovering one of the world's most spectacular sights, the Pyramids. The northernmost and oldest pyramid of the group was built for Khufu, the second king of the 4th dynasty. Called the Great Pyramid, it is the largest of the three, the length of each side at the base averaging 755.75 feet and its original height being 481.4 feet. The Great Pyramid consists of an estimated 2.3 million limestone blocks which are believed to have been transported from the nearby quarries. It is estimated that 5.5 million tonnes of limestone, 8,000 tonnes of granite (imported from Aswan), and 500,000 tonnes of mortar were used in the construction of the Great Pyramid.

At completion, the Great Pyramid was surfaced by white “casing stones” which were carefully cut to what is approximately a face slope with a seked of 5½ palms to give required dimensions. Visibly, all that remains is the underlying stepped core structure as seen today. However, inside the pyramids, everything took on a serious vein. As we negotiated the various interior passageways leading to the centre of the Great Pyramid, we noted the awesome quality of the sounds that echoed back to us. The architecture apparently creates



Getting there

Cairo is the nearest city, situated about 18 kms from Giza. Flying there is the easiest way to reach Giza. The Cairo International Airport which is the second largest airport in Africa caters to about 16 million passengers a year.

Weather: The best time to visit is during the months from November to March

a very musical piece as the sound vibrates and echoes within.

Near the middle of the pyramid, we ascended the Grand Gallery, pass through the Ante-Chamber and then bent down to enter the low narrow channel that leads to our destination. We saw that the floor of this passageway is rough and uneven and we must stoop for 100 inches until we enter the King's Chamber. When again standing upright we saw that the chamber, brightly lit by fluorescent bulbs, is about 35 feet by 17 feet and nearly 20 feet high. The chamber is empty save for the rectangular granite coffer at the far end. This is the famous sarcophagus in which the Pharaoh Cheops was thought to be interred. The King's Chamber's sacred nature is revealed with the elegance and simplicity and 20 rectangular forms which make up the floor of the chamber. These 20 rectangular granite blocks of the floor of the King's Chamber, though solid, can also be seen as spaces. The stones are the keys to the astronomy that is the foundation of the entire chamber. The floor stones represent six planets: Mercury, Venus, Earth and its Moon, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. The message of the chamber is, "The heavens are the foundation of this space and understanding our place in the solar family is the key. This is where to begin."

The details of the Grand Gallery are extremely important and have no parallel in any other structure on the Earth. Its geometric design predicts that sound originating within its space is focused through a passageway past the Antechamber and into the granite complex known as the King's Chamber. This phenomenon has been noted by musicians, acoustical engineers, military scientists and lay people alike. Some of the more puzzling features of this architectural acoustical miracle, however, are not adequately explained by conventional literature or, indeed, in any other literature.

Outside, we stood facing the imposing Sphinx, soaking in the wonder of man's ingenuity and industry. We also saw the reassembled funerary boat of King Khufu (or Cheops) at the Solar Boat Museum. Riding a camel past Giza's ancient monuments was breathtaking, as I imagined myself to be a child again, out to battle infidels raiding the imperial palace. Tired and starry eyed, we returned to Cairo for an evening at leisure. ■

Pyramids of Giza, Egypt



QUECHUA T3 PLUS CAMPING TENT

Looking for a perfect camping trip and not sure if you have the right tent? Don't worry because the Quechua T3 Plus camping tent could make it happen

Key features

- Dimensions: Width: 210cm, Length: 110 cm, Height: 120cm
- Capacity: Three adults
- Tube cover: 25cm diametre, 55cm long
- Weight: 4.6 kg
- Waterproof: full tent shower of 450l per sq m per hour
- Set up: Classic: bedroom + poles + flysheet

Bobins V Abraham

The Quechua T3 Plus is an ideal trekking and hiking tent for someone who is looking for a tent that is light, spacious and solid. The T3 Plus tent with a dimension of 210cm x 110 cm x 120cm is designed to house three adults in really challenging weather. This dome shaped tent is waterproof and has one main room in it. There are two vents, one in the front and the other in the back, that allow fresh air to flow through it. The raised dome shape also helps in free air circulation. The T3 Plus is supported on three high quality fiberglass hollow pole that prop up the tent firmly.

The Quechua T3 Plus comes with a polyethylene groundsheet that allows you to spread the beds without getting it dirty. The door of the tent fully opens which provides ample room to carry things into and out of the tent. The T3 Plus can withstand any heavy rain. It is so convenient that the whole tent can be set up by a single person in 5-6 minutes. One thing it missed out is a hook inside to hold a fan or a light. Quechua T3 Plus is available through leading e-commerce websites in India at a reasonable price. The tent is available only in blue.

Brahmaputra's own Majuli Island

| Suresh Joseph |

Majuli

I reached Nimatighat to take the ferry to Majuli Island. There was just enough space to drive the car on to the 8.30 am ferry, which was chock-a-block with passengers, provisions, light cargo and over fifty two wheelers. I had been warned by a senior railway colleague that the ferries would be rickety and dilapidated. The boat I was on, however, was okay. That it

requires skill and expert knowledge of the currents of the river to pilot the ferry was brought home to me by the sight of a ferry stuck on a mud bank. The Brahmaputra is an awesome river and Majuli - the huge island within it and claimed to be the largest eyot in the world - is densely populated. There are many legends about the formation of that eyot - from the propitiation efforts of King Arimatta to the action of

the warrior sage Parasurama who is credited also with creating Kerala from the Arabian Sea by hurling his axe into the sea. At the time of my visit I came to know that Majuli was being severely eroded because of the constantly shifting course of the mighty Brahmaputra.

The ride to Majuli took slightly over an hour. There were two batches of commuters who were fully engrossed in playing rummy. I



was told to look out for passengers jumping off the ferry as it nears the ghat. A friend told me that this habit of the locals had prompted a senior bureaucrat to record on file that if an airfield is provided on Majuli, the locals will jump off the aircraft before it lands – perhaps the reason to shelve the proposal to provide an airport in Majuli!

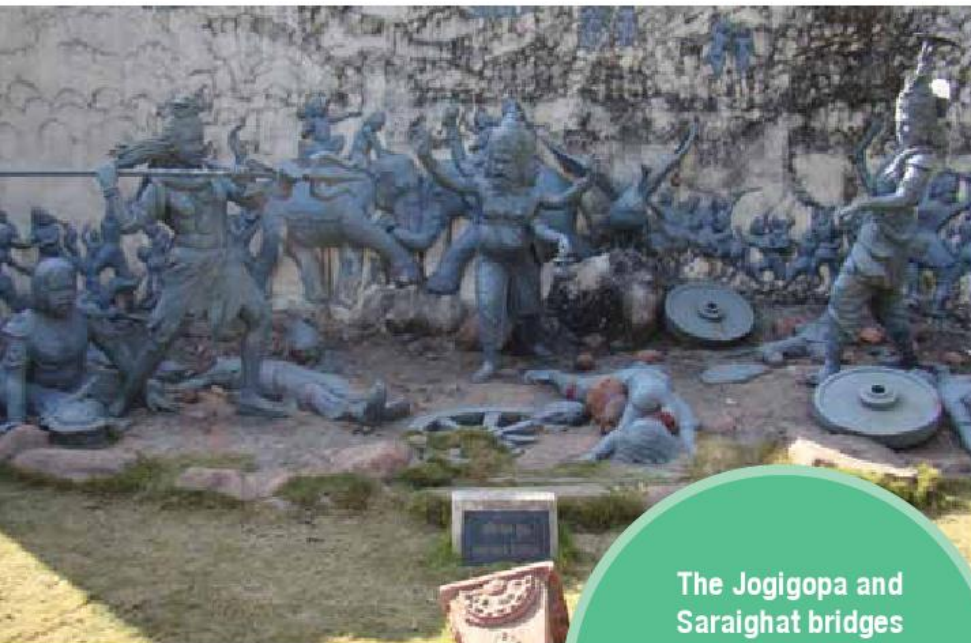
I had to wait till all the two wheelers had been taken off the ferry before I could drive the Swift off the boat. I noticed that the ferry's crew provided the 'value added service' of driving out the motorbikes from the ferry over the steep and slippery incline at no extra cost. And they did it very skillfully and competently. Off loading the bikes from the roof of the ferry was truly a sight to watch.

In Majuli, I visited the Auniati and Uttar Kamalabari satras. The Auniati satra was the first satra set up by the Ahom dynasty. It was established in 1653 by King Jayadhwaja Singha upon his conversion to Hinduism. These monasteries, all dedicated to Vishnu in his avatar as Krishna combines the twin elements of

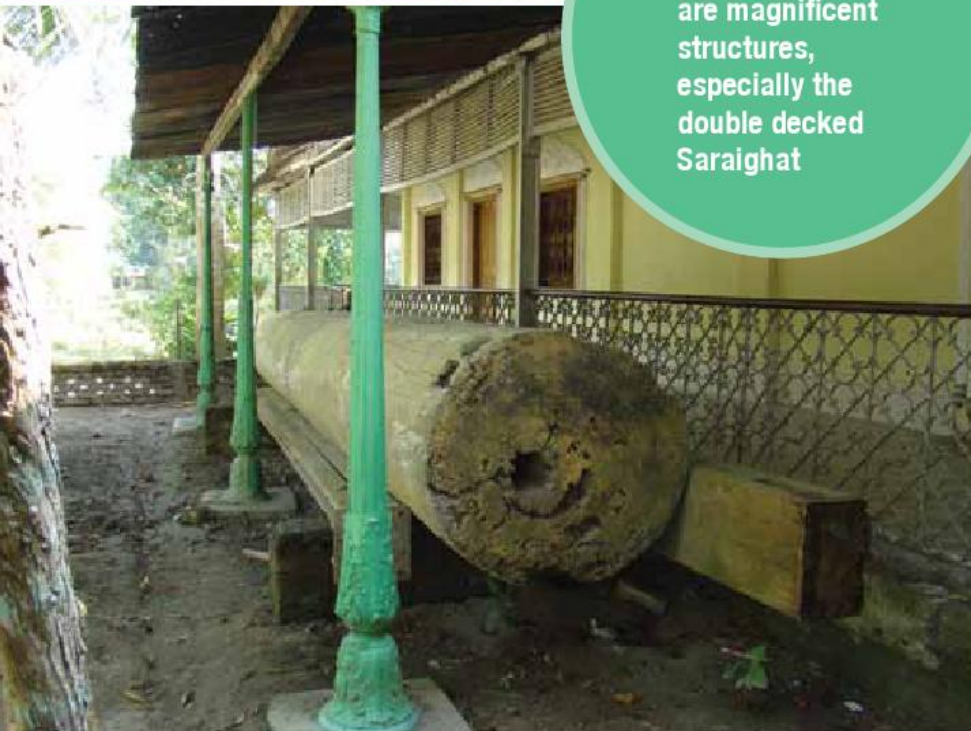
religious instruction and residential formal schooling. They also serve as repositories of art and culture. The monks in the satras are unmarried and are drawn from boys between the ages of five and twelve - orphans, relations of monks or those who get the 'calling'. Each satra remains a self contained community that looks after all its requirements.

The Auniati satra has been the largest and the richest satra in Majuli and houses nearly 450 monks. Just outside the namghar or prayer hall of the Auniati satra was a huge log of wood that is said to have come floating down the Brahmaputra more than 250 years ago when the monks prayed for a suitable support for the namghar. The satra also has a well kept museum with Ahom artifacts and a few rare manuscripts. The Auniati satra, which has been relocated five times in the past on account of land erosion, has been a trailblazer in many respects. In 1871, *Assam Bilashini*, the second Assamese newspaper, was published from that satra, using a printing machine brought to the island by Duttadev Goswami, the satradhikar. Dr Pitamber Dev Goswami, the

The Brahmaputra is an awesome river and Majuli – the huge island within it and claimed to be the largest eyot in the world – is densely populated



The Jogigopa and Saraighat bridges are magnificent structures, especially the double decked Saraighat



incumbent satradhikar, was the first satradhikar in Majuli to be awarded doctorate.

Tezpur

There are three bridges across the Brahmaputra in Assam. The first is the Jogigopa Bridge near Goalpara, the second the Saraighat Bridge near Guwahati and the third the Kaliabhomora Bridge leading to Tezpur. A fourth is under construction in Upper Assam in Bogibeel and it would connect the railway divisions of Tinsukia and Rangia. The Jogigopa and Saraighat bridges are magnificent structures, especially the double decked Saraighat. I stayed at the KRC Palace Hotel in Tezpur which has been advertised as the City of Eternal Beauty, but that must have been some time in the past. The city is located on the banks of the Brahmaputra and has some phukuris and well maintained gardens. The Ganeshgarh Temple which overlooks the mighty river is said to be the place to worship Banasura, the thousand-armed demon king. The Bamuni Hill and the Dah Parbatia are ruins of temples which seem to have been 'disturbed' by earthquakes or some such phenomena.

The legend of Banasura dominates Tezpur. The overprotective father Banasura confined his beautiful daughter, Usha, to a house of fire, the agnigarh. That did not deter Anirudh, the nephew of Krishna, from magically finding his way into the agnigarh and secretly marrying Usha. The enraged Banasura tried to feed Anirudh to his pet snakes but Krishna intervened with his army and the ensuing bloody carnage gave Tezpur or Sonitpur as it is also called, its name – the City of Blood. ■



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Wayanad's

Wayanad, home to unique wildlife, ancient ruins and exotic mountain caves, always attracted me but this time my focus was on the tribals in the area

Photos & text: Ajesh Madhav

Books have imparted information that the tribals of Wayanad district belong to various sects like Paniyas, Kurumas, Adiyars, Kurichiyas, Ooralis, Kaattunaikkans, Uraali Kurumas and so on. So my first venture was in search of the Kurichiyas who supported the Indian freedom fighter, Pazhassi Raja in his fight against the British. Kurichiyas are considered to be the supreme among the

aboriginal groups. My guide Sumesh informed me that it would be difficult to find a Kurichiyar in the traditional way with their attire and hair style called kudumi. The leader of the tribe normally carries a dagger with a silver hilt with him. The name 'Kurichiyas' means 'the one who shot at the target'. A bow and arrow is an inseparable part of their life and they mainly use it to shoot down a bird or a fish.

Despite the drizzle, we walked towards Kalikuni and reached a



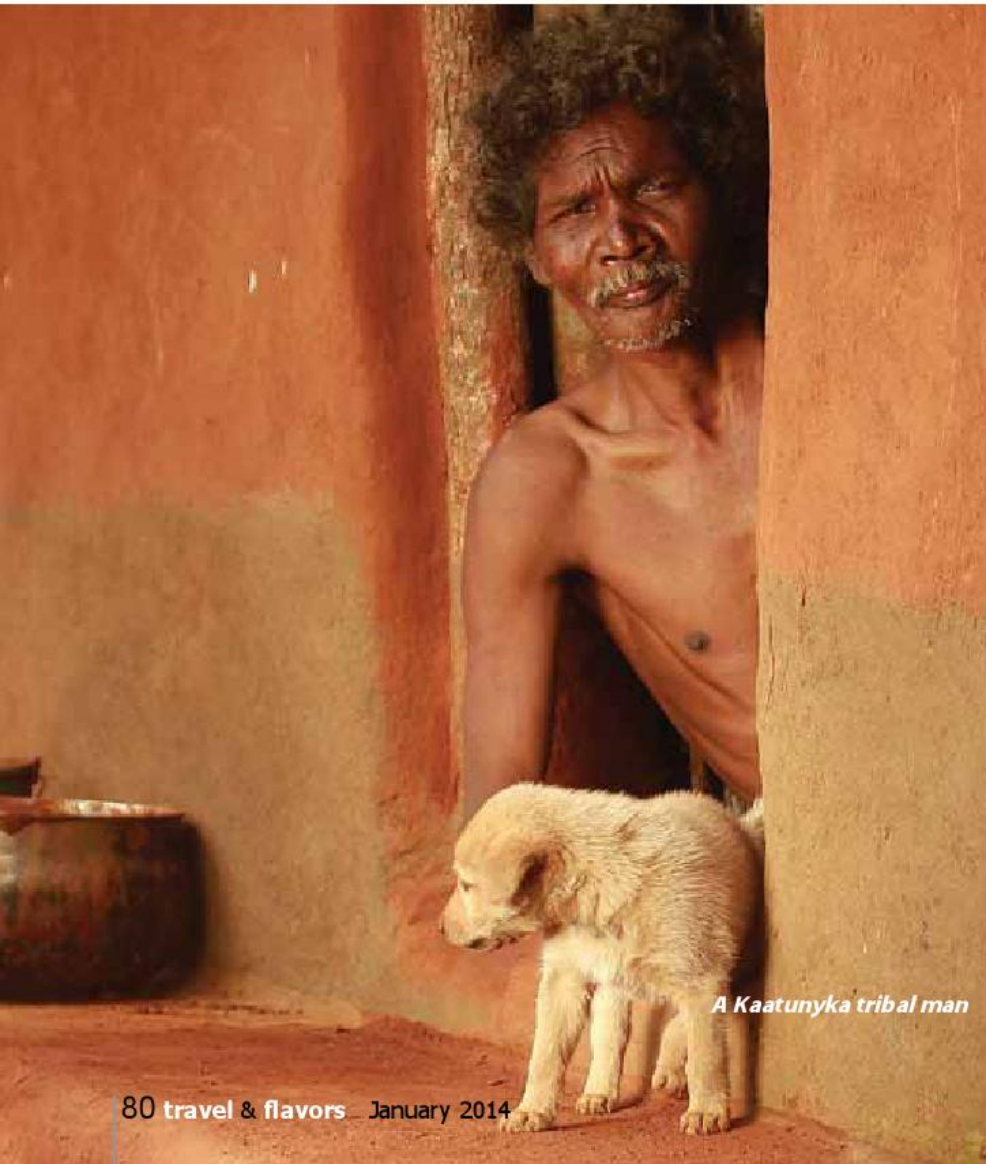
indigenous pride



A temple of Kurichiyar tribe



A tribal woman working



A Kaatunya tribal man

traditional house of Kurichiyar in the middle of a coffee plantation. When we told them about the purpose of our arrival, they seemed happy. Fortunately, the rain had ceased by the time so that I could go ahead with the photo session. The 70-year-old tribal leader was very active and his physical fitness really surprised us. After a cup of coffee, we set out to our next destination. Velayudhan, the chief and the priest of the Paniya tribe, received us with black tea. Paniyars, who bear a striking resemblance to Negros, are the largest tribal group in Wayanad. There was a time when they were sold in the market as slaves, especially during Valliyur Kavu Durga Temple Festival. Women of the tribe used to wear ear rings made of Adananthara Pavonia grains. Since it was a special occasion, my plan was to shoot the poojas of the tribal leader Velayudhan.

Kolippatta was our next destination. It was an area full of paddy fields. The folklore tells that the name 'Wayanad' was derived from the 'land of paddy fields' (wayal). Kurumas, considered to be the descendants of the Chera dynasty kings who ruled Nachinadu till AD 12, reside in Kolippatta. It was said that the last Kuruma ruler was defeated by the king of Venadu.

In the afternoon, we reached the area where Thachnadan tribals are living. Since they migrated from Thachanadu, they were called Thachanadan Moopans. They are also known as Koodanmar. They are engaged in agriculture and hunting with bow and arrow for their livelihood. We went to Neelimala through the Nilamboor border of Kerala. On the way, we had a glimpse of the mesmerising Meenmutty waterfall from afar.

We were in search of Kaattunaikar (the king of Jungle). We reached a mud house. The man in his middle age standing in the courtyard of the house spoke a mix of Kannada and Malayalam. Honey and roots of plants are their food. That is why, they are also known as Tean Kurumars (Tean means



Paniya priest doing his chores

honey). They worship ancestors, animals, rocks, snakes and trees. Their food was delicious and has medicinal qualities. A wild root 'noorukkiyangu' used by them is said to be a remedy for diabetes.

Finally, we entered the area of the most versatile and colourful tribe- Vettukurumar, one of the rarest artisan tribes in Kerala. Their village was surrounded by dense forest. They are engaged in making baskets and mats of various types with reeds and bamboo and pots. Kalimutthi, the centenarian of the tribe, was the main attraction there. Even at this age, she goes to the Kalpetta town which is 20 km from the village to buy the essentials.

The sun was about to set and I was busy taking pictures of Kalimutthi in my camera. Her ear rings were shining in the golden yellow light of the setting sun. Before the nightfall, we made our way through the forest. ■

life is a beach

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CHAMPANER BECKONS

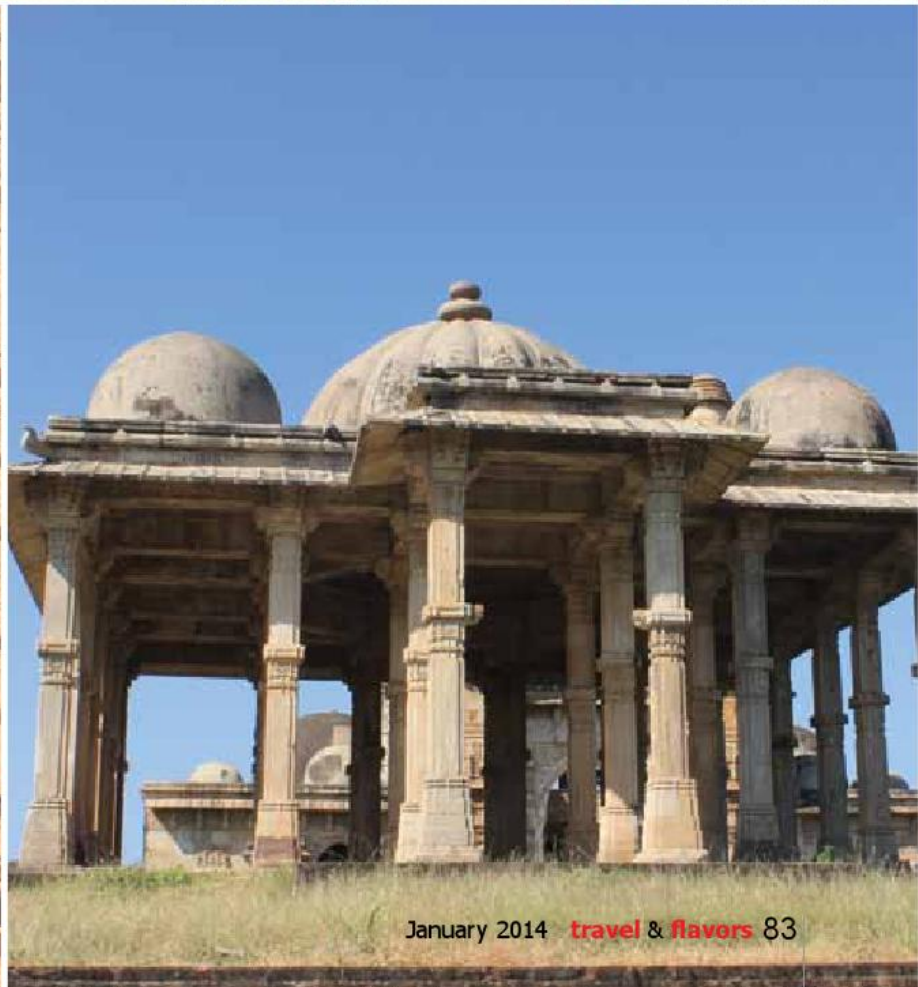


Abin Alex Thekkummattathil

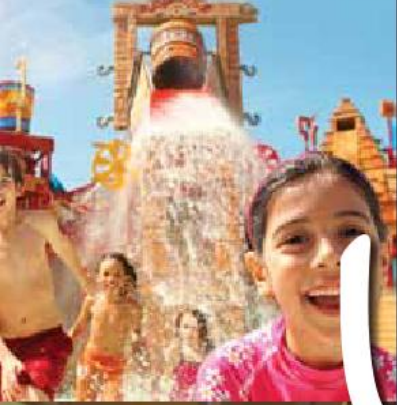
Champaner, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004, is located 45 km from Vadadora in Gujarat, and has a history dating back to the 8th century. Igneous rocks found in the city are a combination of light yellow and red, and resemble forest flames and hence the name 'champaka' and later Champaner.

The city represents various Hindu and Muslim architectural styles. The Hindu temple Kalika Mata Temple atop the hill of Pavagad can be reached by walking or ropeway. Ancient palaces, forts, mosques, temples, agricultural structures and water installations such as stepwells and tanks can be found here. ■





TALES FROM EMIRATES
ATLANTIS

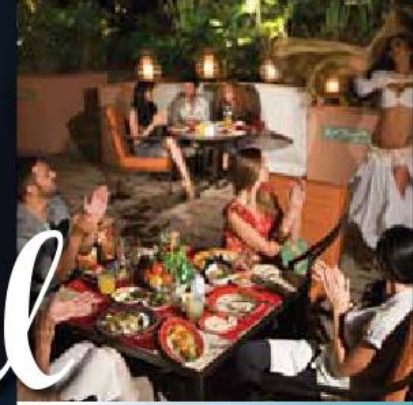


ENTERTAINMENT
ADVENTURE

Unlimited

You can't plan a vacation to Dubai without a stay in Atlantis, The Palm. It's an ideal place for relaxation and adventure in the Middle East.

Prashob K P

A large photograph of the Atlantis, The Palm hotel at night. The building is brilliantly lit with intricate patterns and colors. Numerous blue laser beams radiate from the top of the structure, creating a dramatic effect against the dark sky.

This ocean themed resort, located at the top crescent of the artificial island The Palm, has been the main destination for luxury seekers, as well as mainstay for families, friends and honeymooners who are all looking to experience the complete pleasure of staying at this mythical world surrounded by the crystal clear waters of the Arabian Gulf. The hotel décor welcomes you to a brilliant array of symbolic mural paintings and art works. The walls and ceilings display ocean themed paintings and carvings. The pillars are embossed with sea shell designs.

Ideal Accommodation Choice

All the rooms at Atlantis, The Palm have balconies with a splendid view of the Arabian Gulf or the amazing The Palm Island. A wide range of guest room choices- Deluxe, Ocean deluxe, Palm beach deluxe, Imperial club rooms, Imperial club suites, Executive club suites, Terrace club suites, Regal club

suites, 2-bedroom club suites, Grand Atlantis suites, Underwater suites, Presidential suites, and Royal Bridge Suite are available for guests. The Royal bridge suite offers an excellent view of the beautiful Palm Island and the Arabian Sea. The Underwater suites provide a view from the bedroom and bathroom, of the Ambassador Lagoon, a world of 65,000 marine animals while The Grand Atlantis suites form a dramatic picture of the twin towers. You are also provided with additional amenities, including access to the Imperial Club Lounge during open hours, continental breakfasts, afternoon tea, complimentary cocktails and canapés in the evening, complete access to the Kids Club, complimentary use of jet pool, sauna and steam facilities at the ShuiQi Spa, and special rates for the exclusive pool Cabanas. Atlantis, The Palm throws up some amazing, upscale shopping opportunities for shopaholics. All your shopping needs are under one roof with an extensive range of the world's finest high end boutiques at The Avenues.



TALES FROM EMIRATES ATLANTIS



Stretched over 1.4 km, Atlantis, The Palm beach is a wonderful private beach experience for all guests. There are two outdoor swimming pools at the hotel. The Royal Pool provides guests with a bit of respite from all the fun and excitements. It is a quiet place that will soothe your body and mind alike. Walking in the award-winning ShuiQi Spa and Fitness Centre will awaken your senses and create feeling of serenity and calmness. Upon entering the two-storey 2,400 square meter Spa in the Royal Towers, guests are greeted by a serene water wall to begin the journey to relaxation. The earthy hues and streaming water pathway guide guests on their voyage to tranquility and onto the entryway of the 27 treatment rooms where both wet and dry therapies are offered. The Royal Spa Suite includes a private pedestal jetted tub, lounge area and terrace, all large enough to share, whilst the treatment room allows for couple therapies. ShuiQi further offers full salon services for his and hers beautifying sessions, and the menu is as extensive as it is enduring with offerings ranging from Spa journeys to body therapies.

Watertainment Unlimited

If you are at the Atlantis, The Palm with kids, then you have done justice to them. Teenagers will find so much to do at the resort. Atlantis, The Palm has delighted guests with unusual salt and fresh water attractions and an amazing aquatic eco-system never before seen in the Middle East. At The Ambassador Lagoon, guests look through a 10 square meter viewing panel directly into an 11 million litre marine habitat and underwater exhibit - home to the sunken streets and boulevards of the mythical lost world of Atlantis. Here, guests stand in awe as they watch the sea life live peacefully amidst lost relics. The Lost Chambers Aquarium, bringing them into close contact with the myth and the advanced inventions of the ancient Atlanteans. Along the way, touch tanks filled with starfish and pencil urchins, both found in local Arabian waters, and horse shoe crabs, armoured living fossils, allow guests to touch, feel and interact with sea life. Atlantis has taken the experience one step further offering a range of Behind The Scenes Tours allowing guests the opportunity to



enjoy its popular exhibits from a new perspective and raise awareness of the ocean's eco-systems.

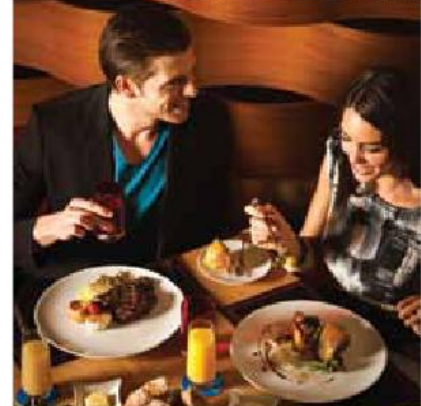
For those seeking the ultimate thrill, a Cownose Ray Feeding at the Mesopotamian-styled Ziggurat in Aquaventure Waterpark, the resort's iconic waterscape, is the definitive feeding experience. Guests (up to 6 guests per feeding) join an Aquarist in the shallow waters of the Shark Lagoon for a 35 minute hands-on experience. The newest dare devil activity is Shark Safari at Aquaventure. This exciting underwater adventure allows non-certified visitors to become marine explorers and walk underwater for a fish eye perspective on the world. Certified divers can experience the ultimate thrill, scuba diving with sharks. This exciting adventure is conducted in the Shark Lagoon, which is home to a variety of different marine species including many sharks and rays.

Dining Delights

Atlantis, The Palm opened as the culinary destination in Dubai by offering a variety of dining experiences that are as varied,

exciting and multi-faceted as the resort itself. It has some of the best culinary delights from across the globe guaranteed to tempt your palate. The hotel has 21 restaurants besides bars and lounges. Kaleidoscope offers you a range of specialties from India, Italy and the Middle East. If you love the Asian-inspired cuisine, try Saffron which offers 20 stations and is a fun gastronomic journey for anyone. YUAN, Atlantis, The Palm's hottest, new restaurant and bar delivers contemporary Chinese with a traditional twist, taking guests on a gastronomic adventure redefining Cantonese and Szechuan cuisine, perfectly matched with spectacular cocktails and the theatre of the Chinese Tea Ceremony. At Ronda Locatelli, Giorgio Locatelli creates a rustic, warm and inviting restaurant that blends the charm of an Italian countryside with the modernity of Dubai.

Providing a full spectrum of entertainment and relaxations for both kids and adults, Atlantis The Palm is an ideal location for those who want to make their vacation an unforgettable one. ■



Ayemenem revisited

Novices to the strange world created by acclaimed Indian writer Arundathi Roy in her poignant Booker prize winning novel, *'The God of Small Things'* would not understand why the small hamlet of Ayemenem in the Kottayam district of Kerala would be so attractive. To those who grew up on a steady diet of her fantastical world, Ayemenem would be in the bucket list of places to visit

Neethu Mohan

W

hen I was first introduced to *'The God of Small Things'* during my rebellious teen years, I was instantly attracted to the characters of Rahel and Estha. She seemed to be a character after my own heart and Ayemenem was like the world of Hogwarts in JK Rowling's Harry Potter series. I never could believe that it actually existed. Years passed and I was given the chance to actually visit Ayemenem

with an Estha in our photographer, Jose. I trudged along on the ever dependable Indian railways to Kottayam district from where I would land in Ayemenem. I wondered if the Ayemenem that Arundathi Roy created in her novel was just a stroke of imaginative genius and I would be sorely disappointed by what awaited me. The first thing we noted as we battled the scorching midday sun was the paddy fields. Thick luscious green fields that stretched to miles on end like some vast ocean with an occasional electrical pole jutting

out reminded me of the Malayalam films of the 70s.

The name of the village itself sounds a little peculiar; the etymology of the name originates from Ay which means five in Tamil and Vanam in Sanskrit which means forest. So loosely translated, Ayemenem means the land of five forests. As this trivia entered my head, I wondered where these five forests were. I was told that the original five forests, Vattakkadu, Thurthikadu Vallyakadu, Moolakkadu and Mekkadu no longer existed. The little





hamlet borders the Vembanad Lake and the Meenachil River, the latter which is central to the story and provides water to the villagers. As we reached the township, it appeared to be quite familiar with small shops scattered around and of course the houses. But the house I was eager to get a glimpse of was the Ayemenem House which is central to *'The God of Small Things'*.

In the book, the great Ayemenem house was a place where visitors were not welcome and the central characters, the twins Estha and Rahel and their mother Ammu were sad and lonely. It was not a place where joy and laughter could be heard. My eyes





Ayemenem house



Paddy fields of Ayemenem

popped out of their sockets as I realised that it was indeed true. Here was a place, a landmark that was as true in reality as in the novel. The house was of course big, but it was not a place which welcomed visitors with open arms. The house was dark and aloof and the day dreamer in me swore that the aroma of Paradise Pickles and jams wafted through the walls of the house. We walked past the ancient houses and reached the Ayemenem junction where the sight of a communist flag fluttering away in the wind had me reflecting on the symbolic communist movement represented in the novel. As we walked on to the small boats anchored near the water bodies reminded me of the tragic incident that changed the lives of its lonely central characters. It was the gentle reminder that we had to leave which had me return to reality and turn my back on the village. Still, leaving Ayemenem was like saying ■



S Harikishore IAS

Novel initiative for destination promotion

Kerala Tourism is organising a first of its kind initiative titled 'Kerala Blog Express' in the last week of February 2014

Kerala Tourism has always been in the forefront of using Information Technology for destination promotion and its new website with an innovative design having HTML 5 is a proof of this feat. The new design allows users to read and experience the web easily from their laptops, desktops, tablets and mobiles.

I am delighted to inform you that Kerala Tourism is organising an event- a first of its kind initiative titled 'Kerala Blog Express'- in the last week of February 2014. We are bringing 25 travel bloggers, writers and

photographers from around the world for two weeks to experience Kerala from the North to the South.

They will be selected through an online campaign where participants from around the world can submit their profiles for verification and undergo voting process which will be administered on the dedicated web application hosted specifically for this purpose.

The participants will be travelling in a branded luxury bus to gain first-hand experience of the natural beauty of Kerala. The itinerary will introduce

them to the local lifestyle and help them share their personal Kerala experiences through blogs and websites. There will also be a Mega Bloggers Meet at the end of the journey where the participants of Kerala Blog Express will share their experiences and interact with attendees of the bloggers meet.

For registering for the event, visit: www.keralablogexpress.com ■

*The writer is the Director,
Department of Tourism,
Kerala Government*





Delightful 'Thali' at Chor Bazaar



| Prashob K P |

Any mention of India evokes a sense of the aromas and flavors of Indian cuisine and such a taste hunt takes us to the Chor Bazaar restaurant at Mövenpick Hotel Ibn Battuta Gate Dubai. Everything went desi here in ambiance and the culinary part. At the entrance there is a stall that offers pani puri—crispy puffs of batter filled with tamarind and green chilly that seem to be reminiscent of the chaat tradition in

For those who love the Indian sub-continental cuisines, especially tandoor, the Chor Bazaar restaurant at Mövenpick Hotel Ibn Battuta Gate Dubai, is the right place. The restaurant takes its name from the famous flea market in Mumbai



Sikandari nalli gosht



Tandoori pineapple dessert



Thali meals

India. After having one, we steps into the restaurant. The décor projects a traditional Indian theme in which the lighting, wall shades in gentle yellow, cream and gold combination, and the framed paintings impact a royal ambience. The venue layout is simple. The décor is such that it stands out when compared to other Indian restaurants.

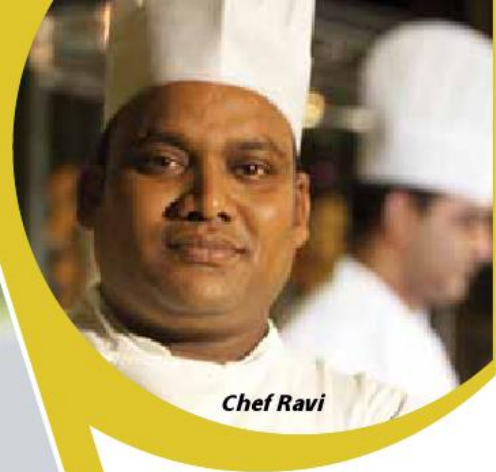
With a view of the kitchen, ordering is made interesting, with each dish on the menu showing where the item originates. The attendees dressed in traditional Indian attire led us to our seats and once we had a look at the menu, we were quite confused as to what to pick. Our idea was to explore Indian dishes, especially the tandoor varieties, and Chor Bazaar has great options.

The 'Thali' is typically a meal fit for a king. Since this meal included a wide range of palatable dishes, all in a single plate, we decided that the 'Thali' would be our way forward in the restaurant. The 'Thali' is a traditional way to present an Indian meal. Baked naan, sizzling prawns, chicken and lamb along with delicate starters of mint puff pastry and soup make a perfect 'Thali'. An unstoppable food train of Indian varieties, that's Thali.

The unlimited Thali journey starts with mint puff pastries, and the soup,



Pani puri



Chef Ravi



The interior of Chor Bazaar

especially tomato shorbha which releases a mouthwatering aroma owing to the desi blend of tomato, ginger and coriander. The spicy hot Malabar curry, buttery and creamy Makhani gravy, Kashmiri Roghan Josh with that peculiar saffron taste, heavy and filling Daal Makhni (black lentils in butter sauce), and the humble Palak Paneer (spinach and cottage cheese) really shows justice to our taste buds. The twist in this gastronomic journey is the skewer studded with a variety of kebabs and tikkas which the chef brings it out from the live cooking bay and slides the grills on the plate. The sheesh kebab is spicy and juicy and really soft. The chicken tikka is also melt-in-the-mouth tender but has a delicate flavour that can improve by dipping in your favourite curry.

The sheesh kebab and boti lamb kebab comes out very well which is infused with Indian masala. The tandoori platter featured an array of meats from shrimp to lamb and chicken- all prepared in the tandoor ovens. The fresh tandoor meat takes you on an Indian culinary journey through Delhi (butter chicken), Gujarat (chana masala), Kashmir (rogan), Kerala (vegetable malabari) and finally Punjab (dal makhani). Each dish is neatly presented in small bowls on the 'Thali' plate adding more charm to your entire gourmet experience.

After tasting some tongue-scorching spicy dishes from across India, it was time to wash it all down with dessert and we inadvertently find much more space in our stomach for this. We started with carrot pudding and then moved onto the well-loved gulabjamun and rasamali. Chor Bazaar serves sumptuous desi food in style and its 'Thali' is the best bet for a flavor filled journey. ■

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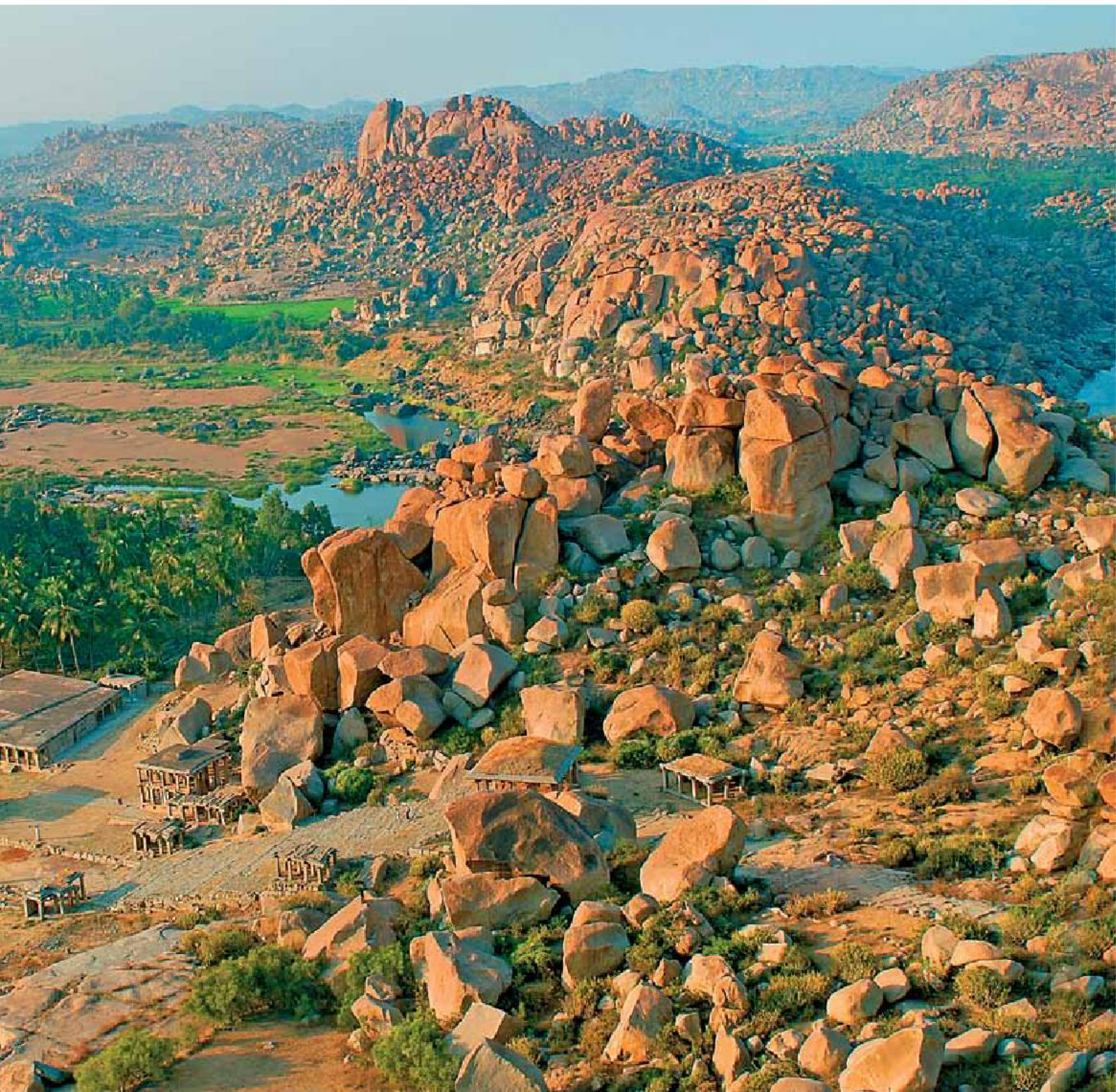


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**PHOTO OF
THE MONTH**





Ancient Splendor

Hampi is located within the ruins of the Vijayanagara, the former capital of the Vijayanagara Empire. It is a UNESCO World Heritage site and is also the site for some of the most noted temples with Vedanta mythology inside the temples. Even today the temples are an active place of worship.

By **Satim Pushpanath**

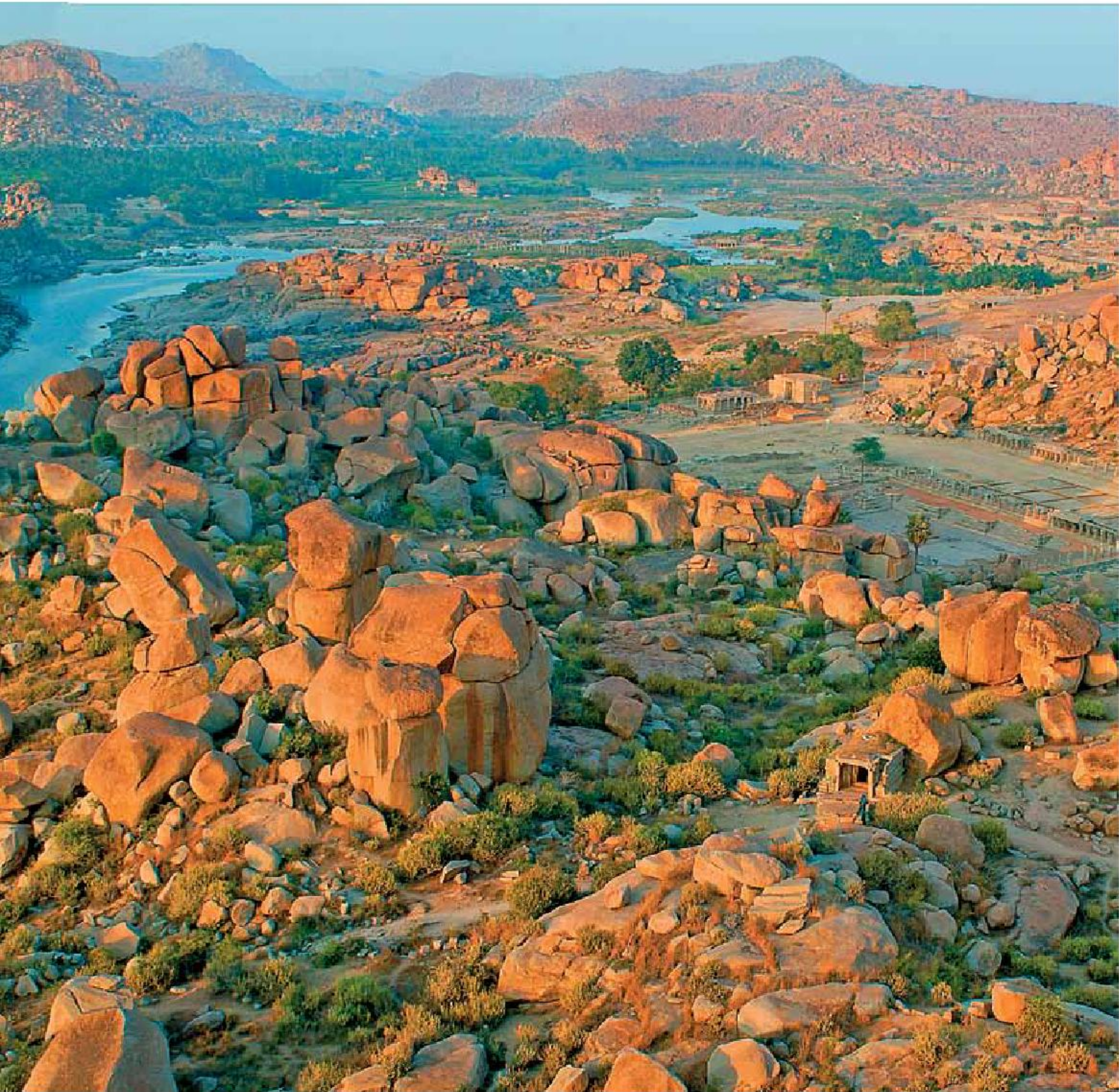


Photo Courtesy: Jimmy Chin



Adventure sports photographer par excellence

One of the most recognised adventure sports photographers today, Jimmy Chin began to love mountains at the age of 12 when he was on a family vacation to Glacier National Park. Born to Chinese-American parents, he learned Chinese and spoke the language at home which he acknowledges helped him in creating a strong sense of composition in photography

T&F Correspondent

Jimmy Chin's exceptional climbing and skiing ability made him a favourite of adventurers and sports equipment companies who immensely value his adrenaline pumping shots. Jimmy spent several months filming super climbers at Yosemite National Park on an assignment for *National Geographic* magazine. The rock walls at Yosemite are 3,000 ft tall. The super climbers use only minimal things like a powdery chalk bag and rock shoes (no rope or gear). The pictures of these climbers in action at the park, which were later featured as a cover story in the same magazine, won him accolades.

The adventurous climbs of sandstone towers in the Ennedi Desert deep in the northeast corner of Chad by North Face climbers Mark Synnott, Alex Honnold and James Pearson were captured by Jimmy and two other photographers. They had to find their way through deteriorating rocks, knife-wielding bandits, broken down vehicles and the relentless heat. In the autumn of 2009, along with skiers Ingrid Backstrom, Giulia Monega and

Kasha Rigby, Jimmy travelled to the MinyaKonka range in the western Sichuan province. The Redommaine Peak which is 20,000 ft tall had a distinction that it had never been skied before. The team took several weeks of travel, trekking, cultural and culinary exploration and acclimatization to make the first descent of the mountain, and Jimmy captured the adrenaline pumping actions in blizzard conditions and waning light.

Jimmy had been to India too. In September 2008, with Conrad Anker and Renan Ozturk, Jimmy set out to attempt the notorious East Face of Shark's Fin, Meru Peak, Garwhal Himalaya in North India. It took 19 days to conquer East Face. Jimmy has also several other successful mountain expeditions to his credit. Now, Jimmy works as a contributing photographer for *National Geographic*. A professional skier and climber on the athletic team of the North Face sportswear company, he is getting ready to shoot more action packed photographs. ■

(For more action photographs, visit www.jimmychin.com)



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Buddha attained
enlightenment
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